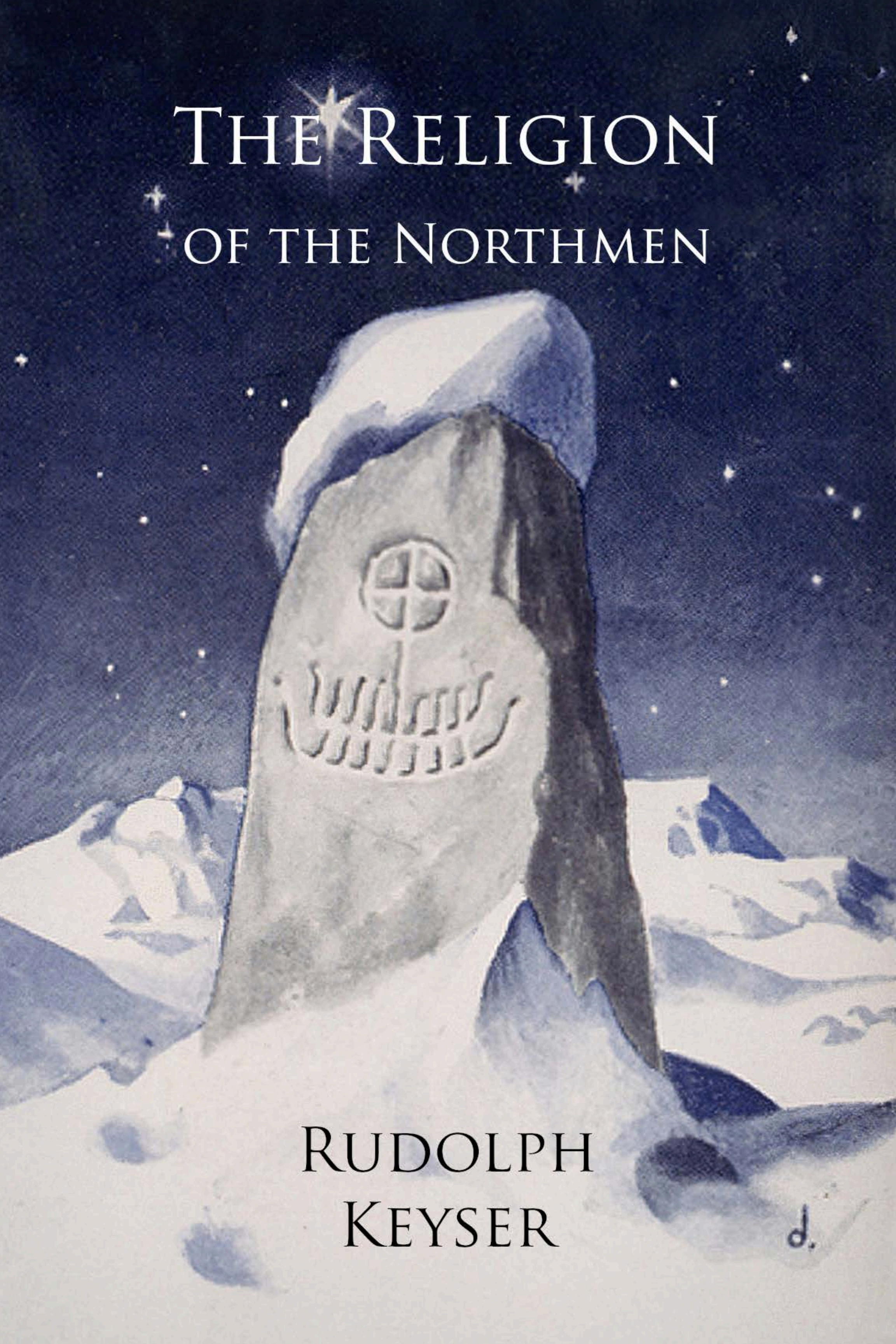

THE RELIGION OF THE NORTHMEN

RUDOLPH
KEYSER

The Religion of the Northmen

by

RUDOLPH KEYSER

HERITAGE

PREFACE.

THE present work on the Religion of the Northmen is a translation of "NORDMÆNDENES RELIGIONSFORFATNING I HEDENDOMMEN," by the learned Professor Keyser, of Christiania. It was written by him in order to give a more extended publicity to a series of lectures on the Popular Life of the Northmen in Heathendom, which he delivered before the University of Norway, and is properly the first of a series upon that subject. In his Preface the Professor says:

"Not only the growing general interest in our Fatherland's Antiquity, but also the student's demand for a guide to the early history of the Northmen in some measure adapted to his wants, has at length induced me to publish in a wider circle, what for a series of years I have delivered to a limited one. I have made a beginning with an Exposition of the Religious System of the Northmen in Heathendom, both because this forms the natural back-ground in the delineation of the popular life of the Northmen in Antiquity, and because the greatest peculiarities of that popular life are connected with their heathen Faith, which extended its influence over the popular character long after its own fall.

In presenting the dogmas of the heathen Faith I have been as brief as possible. I have kept to the more important myths in their natural connection, in order to give a clear conception of the nature and principles of the Religious System. I have thought it the more necessary to be brief in this part of the work, since our literature already possesses a detailed exposition of the heathen myths of the Northmen in Prof. P. A. Munch's excellent work—*The Mythologic and Heroic Legends of the North*—which may serve as a guide to those who wish to study them in detail and have not an opportunity to search them out in the original manuscripts, to which I have merely referred. The Interpretation of these myths is naturally adapted to the preceding Exposition of them, and is, accordingly, brief. But in the Delineation of the Religious Institutions, such as they appeared in the public and private life of the Northmen, I have deemed it important to be more detailed, partly because a clear and thorough understanding of them is very important to every one who would gain a correct knowledge of the popular life of the Old-Northmen, and partly because this subject has hitherto been less explicitly and carefully treated of."

In this Translation the original has been faithfully followed; the only deviation from the text has been in introducing, occasionally, a phrase or a sentence from the authorities referred to, when it seemed allowable for the sake of imparting additional light or interest to the subject on hand. Many notes, merely of reference to the Eddas and Sagas, have been left out of the First and Third Parts, while the notes to the Second Part have been materially enlarged and increased in number.

The Introductory Chapters grew up of necessity. The subject before us and the constant reference to the Eddas and Sagas—the sources of Scandinavian Mythology and History—make it desirable, and even necessary, to have some knowledge of their character and their history. Unfortunately there is not yet, in the English language, any history of the Old-Icelandic literature and its Restoration, to which reference can be made.. An Abstract has, therefore, been here compressed within the limits of an "Introduction," where it must, of necessity, be brief. In preparing it, the writer has availed himself of Nyerup's "Survey of the History of Studies in Scandinavian Mythology,"* Koeppen's "Literary Introduction to Northern Mythology,"† the publications of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries, of Copenhagen, and the works referred to, generally.

It is gratifying to know that while the desire of penetrating further into this field of ancient literature is daily increasing, the facilities for gaining a knowledge of its rich stores are still more improved. The student of Scandinavian lore may now rejoice at the treasures which are brought within his reach by the Astor Library, by which a journey to Europe is rendered no longer absolutely necessary in the pursuit of his studies. In the department of Northern literature the collection of this Library is probably the fullest now existing out of Scandinavia.

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* Uebersicht der Geschichte des Studiums der Scandinavischen Mythologie; Copenhagen, 1816.

† Literärische Einleitung in die Nordische Mythologie; Berlin, 1837.

Should this volume, in its presentation of the Life and Literature and Religion of the Old-Northmen, awaken a desire for a more familiar acquaintance with the works of their skalds and historians, and give some assistance to those who are already interested in the subject, it will be a source of heartfelt gratification to the writer, and an encouragement to further labors in the field he has entered upon.

B. P.

Kennett Square, Pa., *December*, 1853.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS.

PAGE
Chapter I.—The Restoration of Icelandic Literature, . 13
“ II.—The Eddas and Sagas of Iceland, ... 42
“ III.—The Discovery of America by the Northmen, 77

RELIGION OF THE NORTHMEN.

Introduction, ... 85

PART FIRST.—DOGMAS OF THE ASA-FAITH.

Chapter I.—Origin of the World, ... 89
“ II.—Preservation of the World, ... 92
“ III.—The Gods and their Abodes, ... 93
“ IV.—Propagation of Evil; Decline and Fall of the World, ... 98
“ V.—The Destruction of the Gods and the World, 101
“ VI.—Gimli and Náströnd; Regeneration of the World, ... 103

PART SECOND.—EXPOSITION OF THE ASA-DOCTRINE.

Chapter VII.—Of the Interpretation of the Asa-Doctrine in General, ... 105
“ VIII.—Of the Theory of Creation, . . . 110
“ IX.—Of Yggdrasill, ... 117
“ X.—Of the Mythic Divisions of the World, . 122
“ XI.—Of the Gods, ... 125
“ XII.—Of the Downfall of the World, ... 141
“ XIII.—Of the State of Being after Death, . . . 146
“ XIV.—Of the Destruction and Regeneration of the Gods and the world, ... 151
“ XV.—General View, ... 154

PART THIRD.—INFLUENCE OF THE ASA-FAITH ON THE POPULAR LIFE AND CUSTOMS OF THE NORTHMEN.

Chapter XVI.—Ministers of Religion, ... 156
“ XVII.—The Æsir as objects of worship among the Northmen, ... 165
“ XVIII.—Inferior Deities as Objects of Worship, . 179
“ XIX.—Images of the Gods, ... 196
“ XX.—Sacred Edifices, ... 205
“ XXI.—The Divine Service of the Heathens, . 216
“ XXII.—The Worship of the Dead, and of Natural Objects, ... 230
“ XXIII.—Oaths; Duels, and Berserksgang; Ordeals or Judgments of the Gods, . . . 236
“ XXIV.—Sorcery, ... 263
“ XXV.—Exploring the Future; Divination, . . 279
“ XXVI.—Other Superstitions, ... 297
“ XXVII.—Influence of the Asa-Faith upon the National Spirit of the Northmen, . . . 308
“ XXVIII.—Decline of the Asa-Faith, ... 318

APPENDIX.

.—Text to various translations from the Older Edda on the foregoing pages, ... 323
I.—Extract from Egil’s Saga, ... 328
NDEX, ... 335

TABLE

Of the Sounds of some Icelandic letters which occur in Old-Northern or Icelandic words in the following pages:

Icelandic.		English.	
a	like	a	in father
ö (*Germ.* ö; *Fr.* eu) somewhat	"	e	in her
au nearly like ö			
á	"	ou	in thou
æ	"	i	in fire
e	"	e	in met
ei, ey,	"	ey	in they
é (sometimes è)*	"	yea	in yea
i, y	"	i	in hill
í, ý	"	ee	in heel
o	"	o	in not
ó	"	o	in more
u	"	u	in cut
ú	"	oo	in booty
j	"	y	in yea
þ, þ†	"	th	in thank
— ð†	"	th	in with
f, middle or end of a word	"	v	in live
except before l, or n,	"	b	
g, k, before a weak vowel	"	gy, ky,	
except, g preceded by a vowel	"	y	
ll	"	ddl	
nn	"	ddn	
rn	nearly like	rdn	

⁎ The final r of proper names, &c., has been mostly dropped, it being only a mark of the *nom. sing.* of masculine nouns which is lost in the oblique cases. When radical, it is represented by the modern Icelandic ur, thus: Njörð, Baldur, for Njörðr, Baldr.

* Represented by je in modern Icelandic.

† Th, in this work, is mostly substituted for þ, and sometimes d for ð, especially in words that have become modernized and partially Anglicized, thus: Odin, Thor, for Oðinn, Þórr. Th represents the sound of þ, and d takes the place of ð in all the modern languages—Icelandic excepted—derived from the Old-Norse.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS

BY

THE TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESTORATION OF ICELANDIC LITERATURE.

When the rude spirit of the Northmen was modified by the influence of Christianity and the warlike deeds of the Vikings gave way to the occupations of peaceful life, the literature of the people began to flourish more vigorously. The memories of the past still lingered with them. The deeds of their fathers had been celebrated in song, and were kept alive in cherished traditions. These songs and these traditions were full of the bold spirit of the past, and they inspired the writers of the people. Then the things which had been *said* became *written*, and the *Saga* literature of Iceland sprang into being. For a long time it flourished luxuriantly, but it celebrated the exploits of heathen warriors and breathed the spirit of the forsaken religion, hence it was doomed in turn to give way before the presence of that power which had supplanted the old faith and had softened the rude life of their forefathers. The literature of the Old-Northmen became neglected; it was suffered to sink into oblivion. The manuscripts in which it was preserved, became lost or forgotten, and for a long period the early history of the people of the North was but little known to themselves except through the medium of distorted tradition or the semi-fabulous accounts of Paulus Diaconus,[*] Adam of Bremen,[†] and Saxo Grammaticus.[‡]

Such was the state of literature at the era when the Reformation was introduced in the North. With the new life which was then introduced, the love of learning, after a slumber of two centuries, was revived, and the various branches of science were pursued with more or less zeal. In the general progress of knowledge, the lore of antiquity began to receive special attention, and the researches of antiquarians brought to light some old manuscripts which were found in Iceland. At once a new fountain was opened from the mythological and historical learning of the past, and the stream which flowed forth has become rich and copious. From the depths of the North—from a remote and unknown island—a dawning light appeared, the harbinger of a bright day that was to enlighten the Scandinavian North for a century to come, and to extend its rays through other lands and down to later ages.

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[*] Paul Warnefridsson, a Longobard who, about the end of the eighth century, wrote historical sketches of the Longobard heroes, which begin with Scandinavia.

[†] A canon of Bremen, in the latter half of the eleventh century, who wrote a history of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen, and appended a geographical view of Denmark and the other northern countries.

[‡] Saxe Lange, who, from his great learning received the name of Saxo Grammaticus (the scholar), lived in the latter half of the twelfth century. At the instigation of Archbishop Absalon, he wrote the history of Denmark from the beginning to the year 1187.

In the year 1594 was published "The Chronicles of the Danish Kings," a translation from the Old-Norse into Danish, by Jens Mortensen. The appearance of this work gave a new importance to Scandinavian Mythology. The people had been told of images of the gods that stood in former days at Upsala, of sacrifices and other religious ceremonies which were there performed; they had heard of these gods being present in battle, of their wielding an influence over the destinies of men, and in all places commanding from the people the honors and worship of divine beings. But of their birth and descent,—from whence they came, whether they were ethereal beings and gods by nature, or whether they were deified men and heroes—of these things they had but dim and doubtful ideas. This little work, of which the original author was the celebrated Icelander, Snorri Sturlason, made its appearance to give a response to all these queries.

This intelligence was followed up by renewed investigations, and a mass of mythological fragments was found and brought to light from the dark corners and smoky rooms of old habitations in Iceland. The most active and energetic among those who were engaged in these antiquarian researches, was Arngrim Jónsson,* who stands at the head of the Restorers of Learning in Iceland. He labored indefatigably in this field during a long life, and did much by his publications and his communications to the learned men of Denmark, to arouse the attention of northern historians to the importance of Icelandic literature.

In his footsteps followed Brynjúlf Sveinsson,† who did important service in the field of Northern Mythology, by his labors in the same direction. The learned Danes who corresponded with these equally erudite Icelanders, and whose labors were greatly enriched by their communications, were Stephanius, the editor of Saxo, and Olaus Wormius,‡ the father of Northern Archæology. In his department the latter had the advantage of previous labors in that direction, especially of Count Heinrich von Rantzau, Vedel, Hvitfeld, Lyschander and others, but his incredible activity and energy, and his influence, laid the first permanent foundations, and first opened the path to subsequent labors in that field.

Arngrim and Brynjúlf were still pursuing their labors in Iceland, with unabated zeal. In 1628, Arngrim discovered the prose Edda and forwarded it to Wormius, by whom it came to the library of the University at Copenhagen. Other fragments were found from time to time, and before ten years had elapsed, Brynjúlf had found fragments of both the prose and the poetic Edda. In the year 1640, he had found the poetic Edda complete. They were written on parchment, and both came to the Royal Library of Copenhagen. The finding of those manuscripts was looked upon as a most important and invaluable discovery—the crowning labor of their researches. It brought to light the Bible of the Old-Scandinavians, and was as important to the Mythology of the North as the discovery of the books of Moses, by Esdras, was to the religious faith of the Hebrews.

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* Born 1568, d. 1648. He was a pastor in Iceland, and twice Rector of the School at Holar.

† Born 1605, d. 1675, as Bishop of Skalholt.

‡ Ole Worm, b. 1588, d. 1651, as Prof. of Medicine in Copenhagen. Among his works are "Reg. Daniæ Series," 1642; "Danicorum Monumentorum," 1643; "Specimen Lexici Runici," 1650; "Danica Literatura Antiq." 1651, &c.

The zeal for antiquarian researches continued unabated, and, when Stephanius and Wormius left the field of action, Resenius entered, and after him Bartholin, who followed in the path their predecessors had opened. The same relations were kept up with Iceland, where Torfæus and Arnas Magnæus extended their researches in the field in which Arngrim and Brynjúlf had labored before them.

In 1665 the first edition of the prose Edda appeared, together with two pieces of the poetic Edda—the Völuspá and Hávamál—published by Resenius.* This publication was an important acquisition to antiquarian literature, and the Edda of Resenius was long a standard work of reference. In

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* "Edda Islandorum, conscripta per Snorrorem Sturlæ, Islandice, Danice et Latine" Ed. P. J. Resenius. Hafniæ, 1665, 4to.

"Philosophia Antiquissima Norvego-Danica; dicta Woluspa, &c."

"Ethica Odini, pars Eddæ Sæmundi, vocata Hávamál, &c."

1689, the royal antiquarian Bartholin published his "Antiquities," a classic work for the time. It contained extracts from twenty-one Eddaic poems, which gave a more complete idea of the poetic Edda than could be obtained from the two poems of Resenius. In the translation of these and other fragments, Bartholin had as amanuensis Arnas Magnæus, and Torfæus had assisted Resenius in his translation of the prose Edda.

The government also took an active interest in these antiquarian researches. In 1662 Frederick III. sent Torfæus to Iceland to collect manuscripts, and in 1685 Christian V. forbade the sale of them to any foreigner.

While the study of mythologic lore was thus zealously pursued in Denmark, the Swedish scholars were not idle in this field of learning. They received manuscripts at Upsala, directly from Iceland, as well as by the purchase of the Library of Stephanius. But while they went on collecting the sources of antiquarian learning, they were not yet so enriched thereby for want of interpreters. In supplying this deficiency they were aided by the fortunes of war. Jonas Rugman, a learned Icelander, was captured on his way to Copenhagen, during the war between Charles Gustavus and Frederick III. in 1658, and carried to Sweden. He was at once employed to introduce the study of Icelandic, which he did by teaching the language, and by his labors in connection with Iceland. He was appointed Adjunct of the Antiquarian College of Upsala, where he died in 1679. Through his agency the communication with Iceland was facilitated, and emissaries were retained there with instructions to procure everything to be found in the shape of old manuscripts. A large number were thus obtained, among them the Upsala Codex of the Edda. The Antiquarian Archives were established at Upsala as early as 1669, and in 1692 removed to Stockholm. Their object was the preservation of Runic monuments and Icelandic manuscripts.

The Swedish Antiquarians labored even more zealously than the Danes in publishing and elucidating the Sagas, and though the publications of that time are not distinguished for correctness of text nor for faithful Swedish and Latin translations, and also usually parade a prolix, barren commentary or a wonderful medley of mythologic and historic erudition, still they were for a long time the best, and in a great measure the only productions to be found of their class. The Swedes of the seventeenth century also produced some independent mythological works. Of these the most meritorious undoubtedly was Scheffer's "Upsalia,"* although Rudbek's "Atlantica"† was by far the most notorious. This is a curious work, in which there is a most ostentatious display of learning, and it contains some of the most extravagant notions of mythological history. Its name is derived from the fabulous Atlantis dreamed of by Plato and the later Greeks, which he assumes to be Scandinavia in general, or more especially Sweden. Here he places the primitive home of the human family, and he not only refers the Grecian legends of the Hyperboreans and Kimmerians, and the uncertain accounts of the Scythians, Kelts, &c., to Sweden, but thither he transfers Acheron, the Elysian Fields, Olympus, and the whole fable-world of Greece. According to him, the Trojans were of Swedish origin, Hercules a native Swede, and even Plato and his followers derived the chief part of their wisdom from the songs of the Swedish skalds.

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* In 1666. It treats of the heathen temple at ancient Upsala, of the gods and their worship.

† "Olai Rudbeckii Atlantica sive Manheim, vera Japheti posterorum sedes ac patria, etc., etc." Lat. and Swed. Ups. 1675–1679.

"Atlanticæ sive Manheimii pars secunda, in qua Solis, Lunæ, et Terræ cultus describitur, omnisq. adeo superstitionis hujusce origo parti Suenoniæ septentr. terræ puta Cimmeriorum, vindicatur, ex qua deinceps in orbem reliquum divulgata est, etc." Ups. 1689.

The Atlantica, with all its extravagant fantasies, was a natural result of the wild speculations which had crept into the field of Northern Mythology. It was the whole reduced to a system, if such foolishness could be called a system. All that had been dreamed, or thought, or questioned, concerning the gods and heroes of the Old-North, was brought together by Rudbeck in a most fantastic manner, with that barren erudition and total absence of criticism which characterized the learning of the seventeenth century.

This spirit exhausted itself in the Atlantica, and the researches of the following age become more intelligible. Hitherto the contents of the Icelandic books had been received as literally true, and the Eddas especially had been believed in as immediate divine revelation. In the fervor of enthusiasm which those venerable relics of ancient wisdom had inspired, few had thought of doubting their genuineness and truth, and their origin was laid quite indefinitely in the remotest antiquity, even beyond the period of Hellenic culture. Sometimes, indeed, a question was raised on the age, origin, or importance of a document, but the researches were made with a simplicity and naïveté very far from serious doubt, and so much were they dazzled by the gold of the newly-discovered treasures, that all such doubts were suppressed as heresy.* But this ingenuousness and orthodoxy began to disappear, and they ventured to doubt, to examine, to judge; superficially indeed, but still in the spirit of true criticism. The Mythology was reduced to actual chronological history. Mythological systems were formed in accordance with various interpretations of the Sagas, and interpretation became a new and important element in antiquarian researches.

Hitherto they had reflected little upon the ancient gods and heroes. The Æsir were there, and they had taken them as they were, without any skeptical questioning of their possibility. But in the eighteenth century the understanding began to grapple with the Mythos—the one sober, dry, prosaic—the parent of all prose and acknowledging no other truth than the logically possible and the sensually apparent, the other intrinsically poetic, miraculous, and impossible,—and in the conflict between two principles so antagonistic, the understanding carried the victory. Then followed the other extreme in which the Northern Mythos was all to be explained by the understanding, and the genuine myths, which existed only in the spirit and the fantasy of the Old-Northmen, became limited to possible, actual history. The rationalism of the eighteenth century in this as in everything else when pushed to the extreme, became unintelligible from pure understanding, and foolish from excess of wisdom, and it was in the heathen theology as in the Christian, that fiction became falsehood, miracles, unmeaning stupidities, truth, a dream, and idle dreams became truth, under the treatment of mere abstract reason.

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* Thus Peringskjöld was formally prohibited by the Swedish Court from writing against the foolish fancies of Rudbeck.]

Early in the century the study of Northern Antiquities was elevated by the labors of two highly distinguished Icelanders, Thormod Torfæus and Arnas Magnæus, each of whom had a great influence in a special direction—the former as critic in the field of Archæology, the latter as restorer and publisher of Icelandic literature. Arnas Magnæus* also wrote several keen essays, by which he gained the reputation of a learned, circumspect and sober critic, yet it was less by his writings than by what he did for the discovery, preservation and publication of the literary monuments of Iceland, that he rendered his name immortal.

In 1702 he was sent by Frederick IV. to Iceland, in order to make, with Paul Videlin, a thorough search of the island, and on this occasion he collected, during ten years, all that was to be found of old manuscripts, with such diligence, that little was left to be done in this field after him. The greater part of his collection was unfortunately destroyed in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728; the remaining MSS., 1550 in number, he bequeathed to the University Library, and set apart a considerable sum of money for defraying the expenses of their publication.*

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* Arni Magnússon, born 1663; of a distinguished family, studied in Copenhagen; and died there as Professor of History and Antiquities, in 1730.

His design was first carried into execution in the year 1760, when the Arna-Magnæan Commission was established and began its labors in the spirit of its founder. It worked on with indifferent success in the beginning; its first publication (Knytlinga Saga) was a failure, and the Institution seemed likely not to realize the promised results, until 1772, when Luxdorf, Suhm, Langebek, and Eiríksson were placed at its head. Under their direction it went forward with new life. First appeared "Kristni Saga," and others followed at intervals, until finally, in the year 1787, the long-expected First Part of the Older Edda was published.† This was an important event to the antiquarian scholar. It was now possible for every one who had not access to the manuscripts, to see the Old-Scandinavian religion in its primitive, self-created form, and the learned of other lands were enabled to examine it for themselves. The Edda of Resenius, hitherto the mythological canon, was now thrown in the background. This Institution continued to flourish, and since the latter part of the last century it has been the central life by which the multifarious labors in Northern Antiquities and Mythology have been sustained.

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* In 1760, the capital amounted to 13,356 Rix Dalers; in 1794, to 18,500 Th.

† "Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróða. Edda rythmica seu antiquor, vulgo Sæmundina dicta, &c." Hafn. 1787. Vol. 1, 4to. This first volume contains the mythological poems (except those published by Resenius), with Introduction, Commentary, Translation, and Glossary, in Latin. The second volume appeared in 1818, the third, and last, in 1828. The former contains the Epic lays, the latter, the Völuspá, Hávamál, and Rígsmál, together with a Mythological Lexicon, and a Calendar of the Old-Scandinavians by Finn Magnusen.

Among the contemporary works in this department, many of which reflect great honor upon the Danish literati of that time, we may mention Langebek's Collection of Danish Historians, Schöning's edition of the Heimskringla, and the diversified labors of Suhm. The latter not only did much himself for the restoration of Icelandic literature, but he encouraged and assisted the labors of others with princely liberality. A number of Sagas* were published, either directly by him or through his agency, and at his expense. In the same field and with like zeal labored Mallet, Thorkelin, Sandvig, the elder Thorlacius, and others. Mallet was a learned Frenchman who devoted his attention to Scandinavian lore, and by his writings contributed to enlarge the field of mythic studies, and give a more systematic and tangible form to Northern Mythology. His co-laborer was a celebrated Icelander named Eiriksson, to whom he was greatly indebted for the fullness and accuracy of his works. His "Monuments of Celtic and Scandinavian Mythology and Poetry,"* is a classic work. He began a History of Denmark, of which, however, he completed only the "Introduction," embracing the field of Northern Mythology. This "Introduction," with the supplementary "Monuments" was translated into English by Bishop Percy—compiler of the "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry"—and published in London, in 1770, under the title of "Northern Antiquities; or, a Description of the Manners, Customs, Religion, and Laws of the Ancient Danes and other Northern Nations, with a Translation of the Edda," &c. Percy greatly enhanced the value of this book, by a preface of "Proofs that Teutonic and Celtic Nations were, ab origine, two distinct People."†

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* Landnáma-bók, Orkneyinga Saga, Hervarar Saga, Eyrbyggia Saga, and others.

In the meantime the Icelanders had not been idle. Silently and diligently they had labored on from the first, so that the presses of Skalholt and Holar were kept in constant activity. As early as 1688 the celebrated impression of the Flateyja-bók was begun: in 1756 appeared Markússon's Collection of the Sagas.

So much may be said of the department in which Arnas Magnæus labored. On the other hand, it was Torfæus‡ who gave the form and method to

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* "Monumens de la Mythologie et de la Poesie des Celts et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves." Copenhague, 1756. 4to.

† A new edition of this work, revised and enlarged, has appeared in a popular form in "Bohn's Antiquarian Library." London, 1847.

‡ Þormód Torfason, born 1636, in Iceland, died 1719, as Royal Historiographer, in Copenhagen. His principal works are: "An

Northern Archæology, especially the Mythology, which distinguished it in the eighteenth century. It was he who first subjected the whole Icelandic literature to a searching criticism, and arranged and sifted the confused mass of knowledge which had been collected in this field before him; and it was he, also, who introduced and sanctioned the purely historical view of the myths, a view which was afterwards accepted as an axiom, and cultivated by his followers and adorers with unmeaning prolixity and foolish sagacity to the highest perversion. This was by no means designed nor expressed by him, but it was determined by the drift of his writings. After him it was taken for granted that Odin and the Æsir were men, and the mythology only history in disguise. There was much written during the century by his followers, but only to dilute his system; no new thoughts were presented; everywhere the same ideas, the same perversions; only new hypotheses and new dogmatisms. Thousands treated on the Northern Mythology during this period, all driving his system to the extreme. Only in the field of criticism some progress was made by Ihre. It would be impossible to name all the books of the time in which the Æsir were mishandled. There is not a history of Denmark, Sweden, or Nor-

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tiquitates septemtr. seu Series Regum et Dynastarum Danæ" (from Skjold to Gorm the Old), Hafn. 1702; "Historia Rerum Norvegicarum" (to the Union of Calmar), Ib. 1711, 4 vols. fol.; a Continuation of the "Series Regum Daniæ" to Svend; "Hrolfi Krakii Historia;" Orkades, Vinlandia Antiqua, Greenlandia Ant., &c. The publication of "Torfæana" (a Supplement to the Ser. Rer. Dan.) was attended to by Suhm, in 1777.

way of that period which does not begin with Odin and the Æsir as the introducers of civilization, while they and all other mythic forms are made into human beings. Such, to take only the most prominent examples, was the treatment of the mythos in the Swedish Histories of Dalin* and Lagerbring,† and so was it to the highest extreme in the historical writings of Schöning ‡ and Suhm.§

The latter was efficient in carrying forward, the labors of Arnas Magnæus and Torfæus, and he concentrated all the labors of the century in the field of Northern Archæology, which he carried to the farthest extreme of systematic representation. His "Odin" is the "Atlantica" of the eighteenth century; like it the result of all preceding researches; like it comprehensive, strange, even nonsensical, yet not fantastic. This work is the most learned and complete system of Northern Mythology of that age, although it will not bear the test of scientific and mythological criticism any more than its predecessors.

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* "Svea-Rikes Historie," 1747.

† "Svea-Rikes Historie," Stockh., 1769.

‡ "Om de Norskes, og endeel andre nordiske Folks Oprindelse," 1769.

§ Pet. Fred. v. Suhm, b. 1728, d. 1799, as Royal Danish Historiographer and Chamberlain, was an enthusiastic scholar. His works in this department are unsurpassed for learning and diligent research, but in regard to mythology, they contain only the distorted notions of the age, which he has wrought up into the most pompous and extravagant caricatures. Besides his "History of Denmark," and "Critical History of Denmark," his works bearing on this subject are:

"Forbedringer i den gamle danske og norske Historie," Kjöbenhavn, 1767.

"Om de nordiske Folks ældste Oprindelse," Ib. 1773, 2 vols.; and more especially:

"Om Odin og den hedenske Gudelære," &c., 1775.

Towards the last quarter of the century, a mass of antiquarian matter was produced, especially in the decennium from 1769 to 1779, when "Edda" and "Odin" and "Northern Mythology" became the whole order of the day. Eiríksson wrote some smaller works of merit; Bishop Finn Jónsson treated of the early inhabitants of Iceland in an excellent work, "Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiæ," in 1772; Ihre published his "Lexicon Sviogothicum" and "Letters to Lagerbring;" and amid the mass of writings by which the mythological literature was materially increased, it gained the most, in a scientific view, from the works of Thorkelin* and Thorlacius.† Amid all this exuberant growth of dry material in the mythological field, we find a most beautiful ornament in "Baldur's Death," by Evald (1774), a striking evidence of what the myths of the ancients may become in the hands of the inspired poet;—and in the Rector Hálfdán Einarsson's "Sciagraphia Historiæ Islandicæ" (Hafn. 1787), we have a useful cyclopedia of Icelandic Literature.

By this time the subject had reached other lands and begun to awaken attention, especially in Germany. Hitherto, but a few Germans had ventured on the Northern Mythology, as Arnkiel in his "Heathen Religion of the Cimbrians," in 1691,—a work prepared with more diligence and zeal than taste and criticism—Westphalen in his "Monuments," 1745, and Schütz, in several works of a tedious and diffuse character,* yet containing much good.

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* "Vafthrudnismál, sive Odarum Eddæ Sæmundinæ una, etc." Hafniæ, 1779.

† "Antiquitat. boreal. observationes Spec.;" a series of articles in which the richest treasures of Eddaic lore and Icelandic learning are presented.

An acquaintance with the poems of Ossian, which began with the year 1760, was an apparent introduction to these studies. Ossian seized like a flash of lightning upon the fantasy of the German poets, and as they knew not the distinction between Celt and German, he passed for an Old-German bard. Counterparts to these poems were believed to be found in the Icelandic lays, and the latter were actually studied by many for the sake of drawing from them explanations of the Ossianic images and names;—they were studied, and the Northern Mythology became known and admired in Germany. The "Edda" of Resenius and Bartholin's "Antiquities" had been published; Mallet's work was translated in 1765, and in 1766 Gerstenberg's "Letters on the Curiosities of Literature" and "Poems of a Skald" introduced the gods of the Old-North into German Literature. Then the so-called "Bardic School" took possession of them, and gave to the literature a new direction, as Klopstock, in his "Hermannschlacht" (1769), and the "Bardic Odes" (1791), Denis in "The Songs of Sined the Bard" (1772),. and Kretschmann, as the "Barde Rhingulph." Denis attempted the translation of some of the Eddaic poems, but Herder first successfully opened the way by his translation of the "Vegtamskviða" and "Völuspá," in 1773, and the "Runic Chapter," in 1779. After Herder, Gräter appeared as the chief apostle of the Northern Gods, and labored in their cause with great zeal, but without deep insight. On the other hand, there arose a band of skeptics with Schlözer at their head. He denied the genuineness of the mythologic sources, declaring them to be the productions of later times, and their contents worthless fictions. After him came Adelung, who declared "the whole Old-Scandinavian religion to be an imitation of Christianity, more or less obscured by monstrous images and unknown allusions, and decorated with Grecian or Roman ideas." But Adelung, though a distinguished philologist for his time, was inexperienced in this field of learning, and still more so was Delius, who repeated him, and wrote against the Edda without having read it. Rühs stood higher than both; and, besides, did much to spread the study of Northern literature in Germany. In his arguments against it he not only declared the Icelandic poetry and mythology to be monkish fictions, but traced them in a very positive manner to the Anglo-Saxons.

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* 1. "Abhandlung von den Freidenkern unter den alten deutschen und nordischen Völkern." Leipsig, 1748, 8vo.

2. "Exercitationum ad Germaniam sacram gentilem facientium sylloge." Ib., 8vo.

3. "Lehrbegriff der alten deutschen und nordischen Völker von dem Zustande der Seelen nach dem Tode." Ib., 1750, 8vo.

4. "Schutzschriften für die alten nordischen und deutschen Völker, 2ten Bandes 1ste Sammlung." Ib., 1752. This work contains a chapter of "Proofs that the Ancient Northern and Germanic People had far more Reasonable Principles in their Religion than the Greeks and Romans."

As it usually happens in such matters, these negations had a positive effect, and served only to call attention to the Eddas and other productions of the Icelanders, and in proportion as the real character and contents of these works became known, the apparent evidence against their genuineness disappeared. The study of Northern Antiquities became freed from the one-sided views of its commentators —of the historical believer, the mythic interpreter, or the skeptic,—and under the impartial spirit of the Nineteenth century, it rose to importance as an independent department of learning. It opened a wide field of research, which the philosophic spirit of the age has entered upon and found to be rich and productive. Philology was enriched by the ample materials here presented, and in return the new progress made in philology threw much light on the researches of antiquaries. The Old-Norse language was more thoroughly examined, its nature and properties became better known, and its relation to the Swedish and Danish, as well as the Germanic languages generally, was more critically established. In this field the name of Rask stands preëminent. His great learning, his zeal and energy, and the multitude and variety of his labors, are too well known to be enlarged upon here.

Another means by which these antiquarian studies were enlightened, was a thorough, judicious, and comprehensive criticism of the sources of mythic learning, with regard to age and intrinsic value. The honor of applying a thoroughly historical criticism of this kind to the mythologic and historic literature of Iceland belongs to P. E. Müller. By his critical investigations into the origin and genuineness of the old manuscripts, he decided upon the antiquity and authenticity of the Eddas, ascertained and established the time of writing and the reliability of the Sagas, some of them with irrefutable certainty, some with great probability, and lastly, he thoroughly examined the sources from which the two great historical writers drew their materials, and thus fixed the significance and value of their works.*

These researches were also greatly facilitated by the continued publication, translation, and explanation of original matter, which, by means of the philosophic agencies above-mentioned, became more certain, speedy, and extensive, and in every respect more universal. The efforts of antiquaries were now directed more especially to the publication of all the sources of Northern Mythology, as well as a complete collection of the Old-Icelandic literature. In this department the labor was carried forward by Nyerup, Adlerbeth, Werlauff, the younger Thorlacius, and somewhat later by Rask, Afzelius, Liljegren, and others. The Arna-Magnæan Commission also continued to labor on successfully, but a new era was begun in this respect, by the formation of the "Society of Northern Antiquaries."

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* In his "Asalære," "Sagabibliothek," 1817, "Critiske Undersögelse af Danmarks og Norges Sagnhistorie," 1823, &c., &c. He died in 1834, as Bishop of Sealand.

The foundation of this Society was laid in 1824, by a number of the friends of Icelandic literature, who united together for the purpose of securing the publication of the yet unprinted manuscripts. The Society was to publish annually a threefold volume, namely: in the original text; in a Latin translation, with critical notes and explanations for the use of philologists and antiquaries; and a Danish translation for the common reader. The undertaking met with general approbation, many learned men promised their coöperation, and by the 1st of January, 1825, a permanent "Society of Northern Antiquaries" (Norræna Fornfræða Felag), consisting of fifty-nine members, was established.

The Society undertook, in the first place, a complete edition of the Sagas, to be collected under three different heads, viz.: 1. "Fornmanna Sögur," or the Historical Sagas recording events out of Iceland; 2. "Íslendínga Sögur," or the Sagas recording events in Iceland; and 3. "Fornaldar Sögur," containing all the mythico-historical Sagas record ing events of the period before the colonization of Iceland; the latter to embrace "Fornald. S. Norðrlanda," or those relating to the North; "Fornald. S. Suðrlanda," or those relating to Southern lands; and "Kappa Sögur ok Riddara," or Heroic and Chivalric Legends. At the same time they established a "Journal of Historical and Philological Transactions."

This was the most important step that has been taken in Northern Archæology. The Society has continued to flourish, and has accomplished much by its labors. It is in friendly coöperation with the Arna-Magnæan Commission, and through their joint labors all the important literature of the Old-North will doubtless be brought before the world.

The great success of this Society incarrying forward the objects of its formation, especially in the publication of the old literature in the original text and in translations, has been mainly owing to the indefatigable labors of its learned Secretary, Professor C. C. Rafn, who, with enthusiastic love of Scandinavian Antiquity, devotes his energies to the restoration of its literary monuments.

In the mean time, as the study of Northern Antiquities was extended, a countless number and variety of works appeared on the subject, both in Germany and in the North. The mythic and heroic Sagas were treated of and variously explained, numerous journals appeared, which were wholly or partially devoted to subjects of Archæology, and the material of the Eddas and Sagas were seized upon by poets and artistically wrought out into beautiful and attractive forms. Thus a knowledge of the heathen gods became impressed upon the people, and the name of Odin was again heard as far and as frequently as in former days, when pronounced by the lips of his worshipers.

Among the mythological works of this period, we may mention Creutzer's "Symbolik," Görres' "Mythic History,"* Kanne's "Pantheon," Mone's "History of Heathendom in Northern Europe,"* and others in Germany and in Denmark. Finn Magnusen's great work, "The Eddaic Doctrines and their Origin,"† wades through a labyrinth of speculations in his attempts to explain the Eddaic doctrines by the phenomena of nature. · Yet with all its extravagances this work displays great research, and is a great addition to the list of mythological books. Finn Magnusen was a profound scholar, and he made many valuable contributions to antiquarian knowledge. An excellent work of that time, is an "Introduction to the Icelandic Literature and its History in the Middle Ages," by A. O. Lindfors,‡ a handbook which presents a faithful view of the whole Icelandic literature. Handbooks on all subjects began to prevail with the close of the last century; and in time handbooks, or compendiums of such, were not wanting on the Mythology of the North. In Denmark appeared Grundtvig's "Northern Mythology,"§ which is celebrated especially for its poetic tinge; in Sweden, Geijer's "Primitive History of Sweden,"‖ which, in its presentation of the Mythic Lays, treats the subject in a learned and dispassionate manner. Nyerup and Finn Magnusen produced Mythological Lexicons, the former a brief summary,[*] the latter a comprehensive Thesaurus.[†] Nyerup's "Sketch of the History of Mythological Studies,"[‡] an Introductory to his Lexicon, is an excellent guide to that history.[§]

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* "Mythengeschichte der alten Welt," 1810.

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* "Geschichte des Heidenthums im nördlichen Europa," 2 vols., 1822, a work of great research, but which distorts the Eddaic Mythology by its interpretations.

† "Eddalæren og dens Oprindelse," 4 Bd. Kjbnh. 1824–26.

‡ "Inledning till Isländska Litteraturen och dess Historia under Medeltiden," af And. Otto Lindfors. Lund. 1824.

§ "Nordens Mythologi, eller Udsigt over Eddalæren."

‖ "Svea-Rikes Häfder."

The subjects of old Myths and Sagas have been a prolific theme for the pen of the modern poets of the North, but to take note of the numerous versions of them that have appeared, would carry us beyond the limits of a simple sketch of the Restoration of the Old-Icelandic literature. We shall merely refer, in passing, to the names of the two highest representatives of this department of modern literature, that of Oehlenschläger, in Denmark, and of Tegnér, in Sweden, whose works are an illustration of the rich fruits that have been gathered by the modern muse from the fields of Mythic History. Through the prolific pen of the one, the "Gods of the North" have been re-animated, and they come forth to breathe a new and higher life than they knew of old, even as the destinies had foretold of them in the morning of Time, while the other stands as the High-priest of Baldur at the entrance of his Sacred Grove, and in his glorious song pours forth the genial inspiration of the "Beautiful God." We shall conclude this chapter with a brief sketch of the movements of the present day in the department of Northern Antiquities, together with the names of some of the works accessible to the general reader. The Antiquarian Society of Copenhagen has been mentioned, with a brief allusion to its plans. Similar associations exist in the other countries of Scandinavia. The Swedish Antiquarian Society of Stockholm, under the direction of Arwidsson, Hyltén-Cavallius, Geo. Stevens, Esq., and others, began in 1844 the publication of a series of the Middle-age legends in the Old-Swedish branch of the language, of which about twenty numbers have appeared, and in Christiania an association of learned men, with Professors Munch, Keyser, and Unger at its head, has produced, within a few years, some valuable publications, such as the Edda, the Saga of Olaf the Saint, and others, in the original text. One of these, the "King's Mirror," is interesting as the most important Old-Norse work written in Norway. An excellent translation of the Heimskringla has appeared, and many other works of great value to the antiquarian and philologist. Professor Munch is now engaged on a History of Norway, a work displaying profound ethnological research in the numbers already published, which treat upon the primitive history of the North.

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[*] "Wörterbuch der Scandinavischen Mythologie." Kopenh. 1816.

[†] "Priscæ veterum Borealium Mythologiæ Lexicon." Hafniæ, 1828.

[‡] "Uebersicht der Geschichte des Studiums der Scandinavischen Mythologie."

[§] Innumerable Compendiums appeared in Germany also, such as: Scheller's "Mythologie der Nordischen u. a. Deutschen Völker" Regensb. 1816; Bergner's "Nord. Mythol. nach d. Quellen," Leipz. 1826; Vulpius' "Handwörterbuch der Mythol. der Deutschen u. verwandten Nord. Völker," Lpzg. 1826; Tkány's "Deutsche Mythol. Lexicon." Znaim. 1827; Hachmeister's "Nord. Mythol." Hannover, 1832, and others.

Returning to Denmark, we will read a list of the publications of the "Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries," which are a noble monument of the learning and industry of Professor Rafn.

Fornmanna Sögur, or the Historical Sagas recording events out of Iceland, in the original Icelandic text; complete in 12 vols. 8vo., with 6 Facsimiles.

Scripta Historica Islandorum, &c., the same in Latin by Sveinbiorn Egilsson. 12 vols. 8vo.

Oldnordiske Sagaer, the same in Modern Danish. 12 vols. 8vo.

Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda, a complete collection of the mythico-historical Sagas recording events assignable to the period anterior to the colonization of Iceland, in the Old-Norse text, edited by C. C. Rafn. 3 vols. 8vo.

Nordiske Fortids Sagaer, the same translated into Modern Danish, by C. C. Rafn. 3 vols. 8vo.

Krakumal, sive Epicedium Ragnaris Lodbroci Regis Daniæ; Ode on the Heroic Deeds and Death of the Danish King Ragnar Lóðbrók in England, in the original text, and in Modern Danish, Latin, and French, with Critical and Explanatory Notes, edited by C. C. Rafn. 8vo.

Færeyinga Saga, or the history of the inhabitants of the Faroe Islands, in Icelandic, the Faroe dialect, and Danish, with map, edited by C. C. Rafn. 8vo.

The same in German, by G. Monike.

Islendinga Sögur, or the Historical Sagas recording events in Iceland itself. 2 vols. 8vo., with map and 10 Fac-similes.

Historiske Fortællinger om Islændernes Færd; the Icelandic Sagas translated into Danish by N. M. Petersen. 4 vols. 8vo.

Grönland's Historiske Mindesmærker; or Greenland's Historical Monuments, a Collection of the Sagas relating to the Discovery, Settlement, and History of Greenland, in the original text, with a Danish translation, introduction, and explanatory remarks, complete in 3 vols., with 12 plates.

Antiquitates Americanæ sive Scriptores Septentrionales Rerum Ante-Columbianarum in America, opera et studio Caroli C. Rafn, with 14 plates and 4 maps. Imp. 4to. pp. 526.

Tidsskrift for Nordisk Oldkyndighed, *Historical and Philological Transactions.* 2 vols. 1 plate.

Nordisk Tidsskrift for Oldkyndighed, *Archæological Transactions.* 3 vols. 9 plates.

Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed, *Annals of Northern Archæology*, 1836–53, with numerous plates.

Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie, *Annals of Northern Archæology and History*, 1846 to date, with plates.

Antiquarisk Tidsskrift, *Archæological Review*, 1845 to date, with plates.

Mémoires de la Société Royale du Nord, 1836–47. 3 vols. 30 plates.

Besides "*A Guide to Northern Archæology*" in English and frequent bulletins in Danish, German, French, and English.

Among the numerous works in Germany, the well known works of Grimm are first in importance.

A translation of the Eddas by Karl Simrock, which was published in 1851, is the most faithful and spirited one that has been made. In its form, in preserving the alliterative rhymes, and in simplicity and spirit, it is the best that has appeared in any language. In connection with this subject is a small handbook of German Mythology * by J. W. Wolf, and a Journal devoted to German Mythology and the History of Culture,† has just been established by him in Gottingen, which has the names of Grimm, Zingerle, Plönnies, &c. among its contributors.

England and France have also produced some works in this department of Northern Antiquities, but they are wanting in that depth and originality which characterize the productions of the German and Scandinavian writers.

A small work entitled "Chants Populaires du Nord," (Paris 1842,) contains a translation of some of the Eddaic lays, in connection with a few of the popular legends of other countries of the North. An excellent work bearing on this subject is "A Sketch of the Literature of the North in the Middle Ages," by Eichhoff. ‡

In England we have Cottle's translation of the Edda, § a work of the last century, which entirely

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* "Die Deutsche Götterlehre." Göttingen, 1852.

† "Zeitschrift für Deutsche Mythologie und Sittengeschichte," edited by J. W. Wolf. Göttingen.

‡ "Tableau de la Litterature du Nord au Moyen Age, en Allemagne et en Angleterre, en Scandinavie et en Sclavonie," par F. G. Eichhoff. Paris, 1853.

§ "The Edda of Sæmund," &c., by A. S. Cottle. London, 1797.

fails in representing the spirit of the Eddaic poetry, and Percy's "Mallet's Introduction," which, with additional chapters by Blackwell, and Sir Walter Scott's Abstract of the Eyrbyggja Saga, has been published in Bohn's "Antiquarian Library," and thus placed within the reach of every one. The "Supplementary Chapters" contain much valuable information respecting the literature and the manners and customs of the Old-Icelanders, drawn from Danish authorities, but the author continually betrays a disposition to frivolity, as though it was a subject not worthy of *his* serious investigation, but one which you found him engaged in by way of pastime. "A Manual of Scandinavian Mythology" by Grenville Pigott (London 1839), makes a favorable presentation of the subject, in which, however, the author has not drawn very deeply from original sources. Howitt's "Literature and Romance of Scandinavia" (London 1852) is a pleasant indicator to the general literature of the North, in which the Old-Icelandic is represented by numerous extracts from the Eddas and some of the Sagas.

In this brief outline much has been necessarily omitted, in order to bring within our limits a general view of the Restoration and Publication of Icelandic literature; but enough has been said, we hope, to enkindle a desire in many to extend their researches into this field, which offers a bountiful harvest to the Philologist and the Antiquarian, and is full of interest to the enlightened lover of literature.

CHAPTER II.

THE EDDAS AND SAGAS OF ICELAND.

The Icelandic poems which Brynjúlf Sveinsson found in 1643, and gave the name of "Edda," were collected and written down in the latter part of the twelfth century by Sæmund, a learned Icelander. They had existed before in the mouths of the people, and had thus been handed down from generation to generation, perhaps for centuries. They are evidently the product of various ages in a remote antiquity, but nearer than this we can decide nothing in regard to their origin. These poems differ much, not only in age and value, but also in their contents. In the latter respect they may be classed under two heads: the *Mythological* and the *Epic*, although few of them are either purely epic or mythological. The *Ethical* poems, only, may be separated from the mythological, and taken as a distinct class. The poems of the mythological part are naturally the most important for us. They are either general or special in their subject matter, that is, some embrace a comprehensive view of the whole field of Northern Mythology, while others are limited to a single group of legends, or to a single divinity. To the former belong especially the *Cosmogonic* and *Theogonic* lays, as in these the mythic Universe of the Old-Scandinavians is presented in its unity and completeness. Of these there are three, as follows:

1. Völuspá—*The Vala's Prophecy*—may be regarded, both from its manner and matter, as one of the oldest poetic monuments of the North. In extreme simplicity, deep significance, and mythic universality, it is comparable to Hesiod's Theogony, hence it has long held, very justly, the first place among the Eddaic lays. The Seeress, who is introduced speaking, unveils the whole history of the mythic Universe. Beginning with primeval time, she goes through every period of its development down to the *The Twilight of the Gods* and Baldur's second birth.

The poem is in many places somewhat obscure, the changes abrupt, in accordance with the communication of the Vala, and there are also traces of later Christian interpolations.

2. Grímnismál—*Grímnir's Speech or Song*—begins with a preface (formáli) in prose, in which it is related that Odin, under the name of Grímnir, visited his foster-son Geirröð, and the latter, deceived by a false representation of Friga, takes him for a sorcerer, makes him sit between two fires and pine there without nourishment for eight days, until Agnar, the King's son, reaches him a drinking horn. Hereupon Grímnir sings the song which bears his name. Lamenting his confinement and blessing Agnar, he goes on to picture in antitheses the twelve

abodes of the Gods and the splendors of Valhalla, which he describes at length, then speaks of the mythic World-Tree Yggdrasill, and adds many other cosmological explanations.

3. Vafþrúðnismál— *Vafthrúdnir's Song*, relates the contest between Odin and the Jötun Vafthrúdnir. Many cosmological questions are here propounded. Odin asks concerning the Creation of the Earth, the Origin of the Sun and Moon, Day and Night, Summer and Winter, &c., also the Jötuns, the Vanir, and the things beyond the *Twilight of the Gods.**

The language, the narration, the train of thought, are extremely simple. The Jötun loses in the contest, as a matter of course.

In their clothing the two latter belong to the cycle of Odinic Myths, although they are strictly cosmogonical in their subjects. It is thus with many of the poems, that they are in some respects quite independent, yet are in some manner connected with others in groups.

⁂ The poems relating to Baldur's death are of a general character, for as Baldur is himself "the Band in the Wreath of Valhalla," the central life of all Ásgard, so do the lays in which his death is foretold or lamented, have a direct reference to the Fall of the Gods and of the mythic Universe. In them the background is always the *Twilight of the*

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* The final destruction of the world and regeneration of the Gods and men in the Old-Norse Mythology is called Ragna-rökkr —the Twilight of the Gods.

Gods; they might therefore be called anti-cosmogonical. They are likewise three in number, viz.:

4. Hrafna-galldr Óðins—the *Raven-Cry of Odin*, which is wild and obscure, the most unintelligible of the Eddaic poems. Only this much is clear, that in it is portrayed the unrest and anxiety of the Æsir at the approaching death of Baldur. Tortured by forebodings of evil they vainly seek counsel and aid of all Nature and in all Worlds.

5. Vegtams-kviða—the *Wanderer's Lay*, is directly connected with the foregoing, but it is as simple as that is confused and intricate. The Wanderer is Odin. In order to arrive at certainty concerning the portentous future of the Gods, he descends to Niflheim, goes into the abodes of Hel, and calls up from the grave a long-departed Vala, in order to learn from her the fate of Baldur. She listens to him indignantly, answers his questions unwillingly, but at last discovers the King of the Gods, and in anger drives him away.

6. Loka-senna, or Loka-glepsa—*Loki's Quarrel*, or *Loki's Teeth-gnashing*, with a prose introduction entitled Ægis-drekka—*Ægir's Drinking-Banquet*, a name applicable to the whole poem. Loki reviles the Æsir, who, after Baldur's death, have assembled at a banquet with Ægir; he attacks in a most shameless manner, first Bragi, then Iduna, Gefjon, Odin, Friga, Freyja, Njörð, and others, until Thor at length appears and drives him away. The prose conclusion (eptirmáli) describes his punishment. Loki-senna is a genuine heathen poem; its undertone is deeply tragic. The Æsir, in the

true mythologic spirit, are far from angelic purity. They fall rather by their own fault into the final catastrophe, and Loki, although usually the blasphemer and liar, here speaks the truth. That which moves in the "Raven-Cry of Odin" as a dim foreboding, now appears distinctly in the consciousness of the Gods. Peace has disappeared with Baldur, and the fearful distraction which precedes their downfall has overpowered them. The inimitably beautiful manner in which all this is portrayed, renders the poem one of the profoundest and best finished of the Edda.

⁂ Then follow the poems relating to the deeds of Thor. These appear to have been a favorite theme of the Old-Northern poets, as we find in many poems beside those of the Edda. Among the latter are the following:

7. Hýmis-kviða—the *Song of Hymir.* The Gods of Ásgard are invited to a banquet with the Sea-God Ægir. Thor goes to the Jötun Hýmir for a huge cauldron in which to brew ale for the occasion. He persuades the giant to go with him on a fishing excursion, in which he fishes up and fights with the World-Serpent, carries off the cauldron, and finally slays Hýmer and other giants who pursue him.

8. Þryms-kviða or Hamars-heimt—*Thrym's Lay,* or *Bringing the Hammer.* This is one of the most amusing poems of the Edda. The Giant Thrym has got possession of Thor's hammer, and will not give it up unless Freyja will consent to become his bride. The Goddess of Love refuses of course, and Loki

persuades Thor to dress up in Freyja's clothes and go for it himself. The stratagem succeeds. Thor regains possession of his hammer, and with it kills the Giant Thrym and his followers.

9. Harbarðs-ljóð—*Harbarð's Lay:* a dialogue between Thor and the ferryman Harbard, who refuses to carry him over a stream. This furnishes an occasion for each of them to recount his exploits. Harbarð is Odin, and it appears to be the object of the poem to show the points of contrast between Thor and Odin, and thereby express more definitely the peculiar attributes of each. The innate difference between them is implied by the river that separates them, but is directly expressed in the contrasted deeds and occupations of the two; for while Thor incessantly fights against the Jötuns, Harbarð (Odin) excites Kings and Rulers to battle, strikes down warriors and kisses the maidens.

10. Alvís-mál—*Speech of Alvis* (the All-Wise). Alvís, a Dwarf, has come for Thor's daughter as his bride. Thor cunningly detains him all night by asking him questions concerning the various worlds he has visited. Alvís answers and teaches him the names by which the most important things in Nature are called in the respective languages of different worlds, of men, of the Æsir, Vanir, Jötuns, Elves, Dwarves, and finally, of the realms of the dead and of the Supreme Gods. The dwarf, being one of those mythic creations which cannot endure the light of day, had to leave without accomplishing his object.

These four lays relating to the myths of Thor, are evidently of later origin than those previously named. The first two are filled with poetic extravagances not just adapted to the theme, such as Thor's great alimentive capacity; but Harbarðsljóð and Alvísmál are playful and witty, and the latter is quite learned and philological, more nearly allied to the later productions of the genuine Scaldic poesy.

11. Skirnis-för—*Skirnir's Journey*, is one of the most simple and beautiful of the unconnected mythological poems. In the form of a dialogue it gives the story of Frey and Gerða, of his love to her, and his wooing her through the agency of his faithful attendant, from whom the poem is named.

12. Fjöls-vinns-mál—*Speech of the Much-Knower*, is a very obscure and unintelligible poem, containing the conversation between the hero Svipdag and the sentinel of Menglöð, his beloved, who forbids him to enter. The former, in order that he may not be recognized, calls himself Fjölsviðr: hence the name of the poem.

13. Hyndlû-ljóð—*Hyndla's Song*, forms the transition to the epic poems. Freyja gets the giantess Hyndla to trace the genealogy of Ottar, her favorite, in which is given the descent of nearly all the races of Northern heroes: the Skjöldúnga, the Ylfiinga, the Ynglinga, &c.

14. Hávamál—the *Speech of the High-One* (Odin), is a collection of ethical poems. It was once believed, with all seriousness, that Odin in his own high person had composed it. The Hávamál contains precepts for daily life, prudential maxims,

passages of experience, &c., inwoven with mythological episodes.* The connection of the several parts is very loose, yet the whole may be divided into four principal sections.

The *first*, of a purely ethical character, embraces a variety of rules of life, full of patriarchal simplicity and truth, such as instructions for the host and traveler (stroph. 1 to 35) and precepts for domestic life and the household (36–104). The *second part* forms an episode relating how Odin obtained the poetic mead from Suttúng (105–111). The *third*, Lóðfafnismál (112–140) appears to be the instructions of a father to his son Lóðfafnir, which mostly consist of warnings against evil company and vice, and exhortations to hospitality. The Runic Chapter—Runa Kapituli or Runatals þáttr Oðins—forms the *conclusion*, and contains, as the name implies, instruction in runic lore.

15. The Rigsmál is a mythic-ethnologic poem, which with antique simplicity gives the origin of three distinct Castes in Society—the thralls, the middle classes, and the nobles. The God Heimdall, the Warder of Heaven, wanders over the earth, when but a few of the immediate offspring of the first pair are yet scattered over its surface. He is hospitably entertained first by an humble pair called Ai and Edda (Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother); then by Afi and Amma (Grandfather and Grandmother), who are in better circumstances; and lastly by Faðir and Moðir (Father

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* See Chap. 27, Infra.

and Mother) who live in a splendid mansion. The Deity infuses a vital energy into his hosts, and afterward Edda, Amme and Moðir respectively give birth to a son, the offspring of the God. Edda's son is Þræl (Thrall); Amma's, Karl (a vigorous, free-born man); and Moðir's, Jarl (Noble). They have each a numerous progeny. The descendants of Thræl are unsightly of countenance and deformed in stature; they have uncouth names, and are destined to toil continually; Karl's descendants are fair and seemly, and have becoming names; but the nobles are described in glowing terms as a superior race. This explanation of the three castes gives evidence of the aristocratic spirit which prevailed in Scandinavia at a very early period.

16. Solar-ljóð—the *Sun Song*, is usually reckoned among the Eddaic lays. It is a Christian poem, adorned with old-mythic images and representations. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Heaven and Hell, angels and devils, and other Christian personages and decorations appear in it and sufficiently stamp it as not Eddaic; yet it is found among the collected manuscripts.

In the Epic poems of the Edda, which are mostly of later origin than the others, the old Heroes of the North step forth a vigorous and primitive race, who move in a sphere no less noble than that of the gods, but less limited and peculiar, as it is in a great measure common to the whole Germanic literature.

Of this class there is a series of twenty Heroic Lays forming a complete Epos, a grand Epic in twenty cantos, containing the tragic story of the Völsúnga and Niflúnga races. The first three form a distinct group—the Songs of Helgi, the great hero of the Völsúnga race who is peculiar to the Northern Saga and unknown to the German. In true Homeric power these lays stand before all other poetry of the Edda, and in the love between Helgi and Sigrún there breathes an enduring mildness and depth of feeling that is scarcely equalled by any.

Helgi brings us to the Völsúngar, whose history re-appears, although in a much-altered form, in the German Heroic Songs. The poems in which it appears in connection with the history of the Niflúngar occupy nearly half the Edda. Three heroic races figure in these poems:—1. The Völsúngar—the most celebrated, are the descendants of Völsúng. His son is Sigmund, and Sigmund's sons are the famous heroes Sinfjötli, Helgi, Hamdir, and Sigurd (the Germ. Siegfried). 2. The Niflúngar (Nibelungen) or Gjúkúngar, whose ancestor is Gjúki (the Germ. Gibich). By his consort Grimhild he has three sons, Gunnar (Gunther), Högni (Hagen), and Guttorm (Gernot), and the daughter Guðrún (Chrymhild). 3. The Buðlúngar, children of Buðli: Atli (Etzel, Attila), Brynhild and Oddrún; and from a branch of these three families appear new mythic forms, not of the heroic class: Hreiðmar and his sons Fafnir and Reginn.

Sigurd, the hero of the legend, before entering on his heroic career, rides to his magic-skilled uncle Gripir and learns from him all his future destiny until his death by the Niflúngar. Afterward Reginn comes to Sigurd at the Court of King Hjalprek (Chilperic), tells him of the treasures which the Æsir have given to his father Hreiðmar in expiation for a murder, and which his brother Fafnir lies upon to guard, in the guise of a dragon. He invites Sigurd to fight with Fafnir and forges for him a sword. Sigurd slays the dragon after he has put to death the sons of Hunding.

Sigurd enters into a long conversation with the dying Fafnir and afterward eats his heart, whereby he learns the language of birds, and, warned by them, he kills the sleeping Reginn. Then he loads the fatal gold upon his steed and rides over green ways to the stronghold of Gjúki. Before his arrival there he finds Brynhild as a Valkyrja in a fortress surrounded by flames. He releases her from her enchanted sleep, and learns from her the Runic lore and other useful knowledge. He then comes to Gjúki, marries Guðrún, and by artifice conducts Brynhild to his brother-in-law, Gunnar, as his bride. But she discovers the fraud, and at her instigation the Völsúnga hero is murdered by Guttorm, the youngest Niflúnga brother. She then, consumed by grief, stabs herself with a sword, and in her dying words she announces to the Niflúnga race its tragic fate. The bodies of Brynhild and Sigurd are burned upon one funeral pile. Afterward Brynhild rides to the lower regions where she holds conversation with a sorceress. This forms the subject of one of the poems;—Helreið Brynhildar Buðladóttur—the *Death-ride of Brynhild* the daughter of Buðli, in which she briefly relates her history, and clears herself of the accusations which are made against her concerning the murder of Sigurd.

At this stage the Niflúngar, who had hitherto played only a secondary part, become the heroes of the tragedy, and their destinies are celebrated in a series of touching songs, "which shall endure so long as the world stands."

28. Guðrúnarkviða hin fyrsta—the *First Song of Guðrún* depicts her grief after the death of her husband, and the vain consolations with which she was assailed by her kindred, as well as her journey to Denmark and other events of her widowhood.

29. Dráp Niflúnga or Niflúnga Lók—the *Death of the Niflúngar*—a prose fragment, tells of the feud which broke out between Atli and the Gjúkúngar, on account of Brynhild's death, of the reconciliation by which Atli receives Guðrun as his wife,—her consent, being obtained only by means of a potion of forgetfulness, and of Atli's treachery in murdering Gunnar and Högni.

30. The Second Song of Guðrún relates and bewails her sad fate. After a brief sketch of her youth, she alludes to Sigurd's death as the beginning of her sorrows, then speaks of her stay in Denmark, and dwells particularly on the fact that she had been forced by the magic arts of Grimhild to marry Atli against her inclination. Finally she imparts some of Atli's ill-boding dreams and her interpretations of them, as well as Atli's declaration that he could no longer sleep in peace after such dreams.

31. In the third Song of Guðrún (Guðrúnar-

harmr—Guðrún's Sorrows). She opens her griefs to King Theodoric (Þjóðrek), who sympathises with her. Then she is accused, by Atli's maid, of illicit intercourse with Theodoric, but clears herself by an ordeal.

32. Oddrúnar-grátr—*Oddrún's Complaint.* Oddrún, Atli's sister, relates her history, and especially her unhappy love to Gumar and his tragical death.

33. Gunnars-slagr—*Gunnar's Harp-stroke*, comes here in order. Gunnar, cast into the den of serpents by Atli's command, is supposed to attune his harp and with it soothe all the vipers to sleep except one—Atli's mother. In this song Atli is accused of unjust enmity and cruelty, and his impending evil fate is foretold.

34. Atla-kviða, and 35. Atla-mál, the *Songs of Atli*, are two of the most important poems of the history, especially for the death of the Niflúngar. They relate the murder of Gunnar and Högni by Atli, and Guðrún's terrible vengeance, which form the second chief catastrophe of the great mythic tragedy. Guðrún's history is continued through two more poems, which conclude the series. They are:—

36. Hamdis-mál—the *Lay of Hamdir*, in which Guðrún incites her sons Hamdir and Sörli to take revenge on King Jormunrek (Ermanaricus), who had killed her daughter Svanhild, and they finding him at a festival, take terrible vengeance upon him and his followers; and,

37. Guðrúnar-hvaut, *Guðrun's Summons*, containing her call for vengeance upon the cruel murderer

of Svanhild, and her lamentation over her own sorrowful fate.

The main features of this mythic history are the same as the *Nibelungen Lied*, but the Scandinavian Epos is of a much earlier date than the German, the personages are more mythological, and the style is less pretending, while in grandeur and simplicity it far surpasses the Nibelungen.

38. The Vö̈lundar-kviða is an independent Epic, narrating the tragic adventures of that skillful smith Völund, who figures in so many legends of the Middle Ages. As an appendage to the Epic poems may be reckoned:—

39. Grou-galldr—*Groa's Incantation*, a conversation between the Spirit of Groa and her son, who has invoked her, in which she communicates magic blessings to attend him on his way.

40. Grótta-saungr—*Grótti's Song* sung by two Jötun-virgins, Fenja and Menja, whom King Fruði, the Peaceful, had bought of Fjölnir in Sweden, and placed in the magic mill Grótti, to turn the millstones. Fortune, Peace, and Gold, they first grind out for him, but afterward, when the covetous man will not allow them sleep nor rest, the mill brings forth curses, swords, and a hostile army, until it bursts at last, and the virgins obtain rest for themselves.

We have above, a faint outline of the series of songs and poems forming that venerable relique of antiquity, which the Icelanders themselves called by the name of "Grandmother," and which was to the Old-Scandinavians what the Bible was to the

Hebrews, what Homer and Hesiod together were to the Greeks. It is, moreover, the only complete collection of Icelandic poetry remaining,—the only one which (except two fragments, some introductory pieces and interpolated explanations) consists entirely of poetry. Whatever else has come down to us is only fragmentary and inserted in the prose writings, often as extracts from older poems, now no longer known, except from these fragments.

The Later Edda is the most important relic of Icelandic prose with regard to Mythology, although it is by no means the oldest monument of the prose literature of the North. The reputed author or compiler was Snorri Sturlason, and it is supposed to date from the early part of the thirteenth century. There are three manuscript copies of it extant. One in the University Library of Copenhagen, which Arngrim Jónsson found in 1628, and forwarded to Wormius. This copy is the fullest, and is probably from the fifteenth century. The second is in the Royal Library, and was obtained of Brynjúlf Sveinsson in 1640. It is older than the other, evidently from the fourteenth century. The third is in the University Library at Upsala, and was brought from Iceland to Sweden by J. Rugman, about the middle of the seventeenth century. It also appears to be older than the first-named manuscript.

The contents of this Edda are embraced under three principal divisions, viz:—

1. Gylfa-ginning—the Delusion of Gylfi, which consists of fifty-four stories, or chapters, containing a synopsis of the whole Scandinavian Mythology. It

is clothed in the form of a dialogue between the mythic King Gylfi of Sweden and the Æsir Hár, Jafnhár and Thridji (the *High*, the *Equally High*, and the *Third*). It is mainly derived from the poetic Edda, being in reality little else than a paraphrase of the principal mythic poems of the Edda and some other lays, joined together and modified by the explanations and obscurations of the Editor.

2. Braga-ræðr—Bragi's Speech, a conversation between the god of Poetry and the Sea-god Ægir, in which the former relates many things about the deeds and destinies of the gods, as, the Rape of Iduna, the Origin of Poetry, &c., &c.

3. Kenníngar—a collection of poetic denomination and paraphrases. It begins with Odin and the poetic Art, then follow paraphrases of the Æsir and Asynjur, of the World, the Earth, the Sea, the Sun, the Wind, Fire, Summer, Man, Woman, Gold, &c., finally of War, of Arms, of a Ship, of Christ, the Emperor, Kings, Rulers, &c. The whole is arranged in questions and answers, and many prose narrations are given in explanation of particular passages, such as Thor's Combat with Geirröð, Ottar's expiration for murder, Sigurd's history, &c., as well as passages of poems, and even whole poems, such as Thors-drapa, Bjarkamál, &c.

A supplement to the Kenníngar, by the name of Heiti, is found in some of the copies, which consists of denominations in Scaldic language, without paraphrases. It contains terms for the Scaldic Art, the gods, the heavenly bodies, the earth, various natural objects, the changes of seasons, &c., all illustrated by examples from the lays of the Skalds.

The Skalda, *i. e.*, Poetics, is usually included among the Eddaic writings, as it was found in the collection with them. It is a treatise on Prosody, Rhetoric, &c., written by Snorri's nephew, Olaf Thordsson, one of the latest of the Skalds, and contains a number of epithets and metaphors used by the Skalds, illustrated by specimens of their poetry, as well as by a poem by Snorri, written in a hundred different metres. The whole collection is also called Háttatal or Háttalykil—Enumeration of Metres or Clavis Metrica.

Beside these, there is a Preface (formáli), which begins with the Creation of the World, and ends with the emigration of the Trojans from Asia into the North, and a Conclusion (eptirmáli) after the mythological part. They were probably written by Snorri himself, and are an absurd mixture of Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Scandinavian myths and legends, thrown together in a confused mass. They appear to be the attempt of a learned Christian to give a philosophical and historical foundation to the Æsir doctrines, and to bring them into conformity with the Judaic and heathen traditions.

The "Kenníngar" is the most important part of the prose Edda, as it gives an insight into the nature of the poetic spirit and the mythic conceptions of the Old-Scandinavians, and by its illustrations and paraphrases it opens the way to an understanding of the Sagas.

We will now turn to the Sagas of Iceland, and take a hasty glance at the character and contents of the most prominent among them. We say "of Iceland," for, although many of them record events wholly out of Iceland, and they are written in the language common to the Norsemen before the discovery of Iceland, which is therefore properly called the "Old Norse," still they were written by Icelanders and preserved on the island, therefore the literature which they embody is properly *Icelandic.* Saga, in its original meaning, was a *Saying,* a *Spoken* narration, and when these "sayings" came to be written down, they still retained the name which had become established, and Saga came to signify a written history, a book of traditions or sayings.

The Old-Icelanders did not distinguish very critically between mythic and historic narrative. In the fresh life of a primitive heathen people, in whom the imagination is active, and the Actual and the Imaginary are not very clearly separated, fiction becomes real, and reality becomes poetical. The ideal world of Gods and Heroes was not believed in as existing merely in the poet's fancy, but as an outward, physical reality, like the human world around them. Therefore every narration was called a Saga whether mythical, poetical, or purely historical, so that the Sagas embrace every prose narration, every general, local, or family history, every biography of a Skald, a chieftain or a priest, as well as the mythic histories of the Völsungar, the Ynglingar, &c.—in short, the whole historical literature of

Old-Iceland is, in the broad sense of the term, only one continuous, unending Saga.

The Sagas may be divided into the *Poetic* or *Fictitious*, and the *Historical*—the former embracing the *Mythic* and the *Romantic*, the latter including all *general*, *local* and *family Histories*, and *Biographies*.

Of the *Mythic class* we have—1. The Völsúnga-saga; 2. The Nornagests-saga, and 3. The Vilkina-saga, which contain the same story of the Völsúngar and Niflúngar. The two former are mostly drawn from the Eddaic Lays, although the first refers to other poems now lost, and the second is much disguised by arbitrary fiction. The Vilkina-saga is the history of Diedrich of Bern, a collection of Sagas in accordance with the German *Heldenbuch* and *Nibelungen Lied.* It has not the stamp of antiquity which the others possess, being evidently written about the fourteenth century, and though not a translation from the German, is wholly written down from the German stories. 4. Fundinn Noregr—the Found Norway—is a curious attempt at a genealogical history of Ancient Norway, drawn from mythological names and genealogies. For a long time it was regarded as a reliable source of history, and is the basis of many earlier historical works on the North.

The following heroic Sagas belong also to the *Mythic class*, for, although the heroes are remotely historical, yet amid the drapery of the Sagas they step forth as mythic beings:—1. Hálfs-saga, which relates the history of King Alfrek, of Hörðaland,

and of the hero Hálf and his warriors. It abounds in quotations from old poems, and dates from about the thirteenth century. 2. Sagan af Hrólfi Konúngi Kraka ok Köppum hans. The history of King Hrólf Kraka and his Champions. Hrólf Kraka is the chief personage of the mythic race of Skjöldúngar, with whose name is connected the history of the most celebrated Old-Danish Heroes, so that we have rather a complete Book of Heroes than a single Saga. It is thus divided into sections comprising the histories of King Fróði, of Hroar and Helgi, of Svipdagr and his brothers, of Bodvar Bjarki and his brothers, of Hjalti the Meek, of Adils the Upsala-King and the Expedition of Hrólf and his Champions into Sweden, of the End of King Hrólf and his Champions.

These may have been independent Sagas originally, which were afterward collected from old traditions by the Saga writer. In their present form they are not older than the fourteenth century, but the subjects are far more ancient, as is seen by the Bjarka-mál, a poem in it which was known, in the early part of the eleventh century, as a very ancient song. 3. Saga af Ragnari Konúngi Lóðbrók ok Sonum hans—The history of King Ragnar Lóðbrók and his sons. Ragnar Lóðbrók approaches Hrólf Kraka in mythic glory, but is more historical, as he was the hero of the sea-roving life of the Northmen, especially in the plundering expeditions by which England was laid waste after the close of the eighth century. As these expeditions first brought the North out of its mythic *clair-obscurity* into historical light, Ragnar is the personage who represents the transition of the proper Saga into History. While he appears as a mythic Hero in the Icelandic songs and narrations, he is a purely historical character in the Chronicles of the Old Annalists of England, France, and Germany. There is no certain proof of the existence of the more ancient Ynglíngar, Skjöldúngar, &c., but we may affirm that Ragnar Lóðbrók lived about the close of the eighth and beginning of the ninth century. All the rapacity and wild adventure which characterized the early piratical expeditions to England, became connected with his name, and he thus gradually became a legendary being—a personification of the Víking-life. It is that spirit, in its wild and dreadful reality, that appears in this Saga. It was written down in the fourteenth century, and contains many poems of older date, among them the celebrated "Death Song of Ragnar Lóðbrók" (Lóðbrókarkviða), which belongs to the Golden Age of Skaldic literature, *i. e.*, about the tenth century. A short sketch of Ragnar's Sons (Þáttr af Ragnars Sonum), and another fragment on the Upland Kings (af Upplendínga Konúngum), are connected with this Saga. 4. Sögubrot—a Historical Fragment of some of the Old Kings of Denmark and Sweden, which is regarded by some as a fragment of the lost Skjöldúnga Saga.

There are other Sagas which might be called mythic, as the material of some of them is taken from heathen traditions, and others are founded upon ancient songs, but they are so fantastically adorned, and the genuine legend is so transformed and variegated by the fictions of the writer, that they are more properly *Romantic* than *Mythic.* In the best Sagas of this class the violation of the original material was not caused by the caprice of the individual, so much as by the change which had been wrought upon the general mind through the influence of Christianity and the Romanticism of the Middle Ages. The views and feelings of the mass became gradually estranged from heathenism, and in the fourteenth century (in which the most of them were written), the Gods, Heroes, Elves, Valas, &c., were looked upon by the people only as Kings, Knights, Sorcerers, Witches, &c.

All the Sagas of this class border on the fabulous; some are pure fable, others are chivalric Romances. Some are not to be slighted for richness of invention, skillful development and graceful representation, while others are flat stories of goblins and witches. They have little mythological importance, except that here and there a pure grain of Mythos may be picked out from a great mass of rubbish.

The best known among them are Friðþjofs-saga and Hervarar-saga. The former is probably from the beginning of the fourteenth century, and is full of most beautiful poetry. The subject is thoroughly mythic, but the romantic predominates in the treatment. It is interesting for its representation of the worship of Baldur and his temple. The latter contains some very fine poems inwoven among much fabulous matter. The most celebrated among them Hervarar-kviða—Hervör's conversation with her father Angantyr, whom she calls out of the grave in order to obtain from him the magic sword Tyrfing. The poem is much older than the prose narration; it is in true heathen spirit, and possesses great power.

In this class may also be reckoned the Saga of Ketil Hæng, of Grim the Bearded (Loðinkinna), Örvar Odd's Saga, Saga of An the Archer (Bogsveigis, *Bow-bender*), of Thorstein Víkingsson and a number more, which we need not enumerate. There are also many legends translated or drawn from the mediæval Romantic literature of other nations. All of the best productions of the Romantic spirit in Southern lands was appropriated with restless activity by the Icelanders, especially the numberless sacred legends of the Middle Ages. All that was sung or written in Germany, France, England, Spain, and Belgium, of Charlemagne, of Arthur and the Round Table, of the Holy Grail, &c., they collected and translated or related anew. So are there Icelandic versions of Flores and Blanchiflora, of Tristan, of Parcival, and of Lohengrin, &c., of the legends of Melusina, Magelona, and others, in short, of almost all the Epic productions of the Provençals and the Minnesängers. The most of these appeared in the early part of the thirteenth century, in the Golden Age of Icelandic prose.

The *Historical class* constitutes by far the most extensive and valuable department of the Icelandic Saga-literature. It embraces more than a hundred Sagas, which throw much light upon the institutions and government, the manners and customs of the North. In them we find the family and the commonwealth minutely and clearly described in their various relations, while in general history they contain rich treasures for the historian and archæologist, which are even yet comparatively untouched, and out of the North are almost unknown.

They likewise present a rich field of mythological research, not so much in mythic memorials—for of these they contain few, except in the inwoven Skaldic lays—as in the information they give concerning the worship and the entire manifestation of Northern Heathendom. They lay down a mass of minute and credible statements in regard to the temples, festivals, offerings, religious rites, &c., which are indispensable in writing a history of the Idol-worship of Scandinavia.

The love of history was enkindled among the Icelanders by their intense national feelings, and the interest in public affairs which was required by their free institutions, as well as by their attachment to the Old and the Inherited, and their constant longing for their Mother Country. As soon as the written language was developed they began to write history, and it is worthy of remark that the Historical Sagas were almost universally written before the Mythic and Romantic ones. Their age is chiefly the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. The sources of history were the lays of the Skalds, and the genealogical *trees* which every chieftain was careful to preserve.

The historiography of Iceland is generally confined to the history of the island itself, and of the Northern Kingdoms, hence the Sagas of this class are divided into *Icelanders' Histories* (Íslendínga Sögur) and the *Histories of their Ancestors* (Fornmanna Sögur). To the former belong all that relate to Iceland, usually including those of the Orkneys, Faroes, and Greenland. The General Histories are few in number. They are: 1. Íslendínga-bók, the Icelanders' Book, written by Ari Fróði, and usually entitled "Schedæ," which is regarded as the oldest book of the whole Icelandic literature. It is a dry and meagre sketch of the most important events of Iceland from the first settlement down to about the year 1120.

2. Landnáma-bók—*Land-taking Book*, a detailed history of the early settlement and appropriation of Iceland until toward the end of the tenth century. It is also rather dry, from the long lists of names and genealogies, but the details are more interesting than the "Schedæ." It presents a good picture of the religious ceremonies, and of their connection with judicial and political affairs. It was written and continued by various authors, and received its present form about the end of the thirteenth, or beginning of the fourteenth century.

3. Kristni-saga, a History of the Introduction of Christianity into Iceland. It opens with the year 981, closes with 1121, and appears to have been written in the beginning of the fourteenth century. It contains much important information respecting the heathen life and occupations of the Icelanders. To these may be added the Orkneyínga-saga, a his-

tory of the Orkneian Jarls from the end of the ninth to the middle of the thirteenth century, and the Færeyinga-saga, strictly the biography of the two chieftains, Thrand and Sigmund Brestason; but as they gain authority over the Faroes, it becomes also a history of the islands themselves. It embraces the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries, and appears to have been written in the twelfth. The events which it relates still live in the mouths of the Faroe people.

The Local and Family Histories and Biographies are far more numerous, as well as more entertaining and instructive. They give an insight into the private life of the people, and although they usually contain events of trifling importance, such as family quarrels, deeds of vengeance, legal trials, journeys to Iceland, Norway, England, &c., yet in vivacity of manner, freshness of delineation, and simplicity of style they are very attractive. They are, in effect, Romances, but Romances which have a historical foundation, and, making allowance for poetical decorations, are strictly historical in their minutest details. It is in fact their minute individualization of events, circumstances, and characters, together with the manner of narration, which gives them the character of Romances. The most important among those written in the twelfth century are: 1. Viga-Styrs-saga, the history of the chieftain Agrip, who on account of his quarrelsome disposition and deeds of blood was called Viga-Styr, and was finally slain by Gest, the son of one of his victims. His son Thorhall then pursues Gest for a long course of years, even to Byzantium, but finally they are reconciled. In the meantime, however, one Snorri Goði kills a kinsman of Viga-Stýr; which act, according to the laws of retaliation, calls for vengeance from the friends of the deceased. 2. In Heiðarviga-saga, the "Story of the Battle on the Heath," the friends of the murdered man avenge themselves by slaying Hall Guðmundsson, a friend of Snorri's, and the brothers of the latter again retaliate, after which the parties engage in the "Battle on the Heath," from which the Saga is named. Peace is finally established by Snorri's ingenuity. The time of action is in the latter part of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh.

3. Niáls-saga closes with the year 1017. In richness and variety it is far superior to any of this class. A mass of occurrences are here brought together and arranged into a well-ordered whole. The various personages are well delineated, while their respective characters are maintained throughout, and always presented with dramatic effect. There are scenes of the most touching pathos, such as the burning of Niál and his sons, and the narration is often relieved by a vein of humor. The numerous assemblies of the people and legal trials which are described, give us a good idea of the judicial and political institutions of Iceland. Making allowance for the tedium of some of these details, this Saga will not lose by comparison with the higher literature of any age. It contains many poems, among them the celebrated song of the Valkyrjur.

4. Gunlaugs Ormstungu-saga, is the life of the Skald Gunlaug, the Serpent-Tongued, who traveled about much in Norway, England, and Sweden, was loved and caressed for his talents, and hated for his cutting sarcasm. He was killed in a duel in the year 1013.

5. Viga-Glums-saga. History of the chieftan Glum, who became notorious by his cunning and impudence in some unimportant quarrels, and who died in 1003 as a Christian. Although there are few important or interesting occurrences in this Saga, it contains valuable contributions to the history of the worship and religious tenets of the Icelanders.

6. Egils-saga is, perhaps, the most attractive of the Icelandic Biographies. Egil, a renowned poet and chieftain, lived in the tenth century. His life was most active, wild and adventurous. Under every variety of circumstances he roved about in the North-lands, and plundered on the coasts of Friesland, Saxony and Prussia; his violent passion, his quarrelsome and vindictive disposition precipitated him into the most desperate situations, but cunning, physical strength, and his poetic gift, always rescued him. Wearied at length with this barren, unstable life, and rich in experience, in renown, and in treasures, he returned to his distant home, where he lived to an advanced age, celebrated as a Skald and feared as a chieftain, and died adventurously at last.

7. Kormaks-saga. Kormak was scarcely less renowned as a poet than Egil, of whom he was a co-

temporary; but his mildness and affability were in pleasing contrast with the daring and blood-stained Egil. His whole life appears under the influence of one feeling—his love to Steingerða. But this love was unfortunate through his own fault; and Steingerða became affianced to another. Kormak travels in the vain hope of repose, meets with various adventures in a sea-roving life, and continues to write verses in praise of Steingerða to the day of his death.

8. Vatnsdæla-saga begins in the ninth century, before the colonization of Ireland, and relates the fortunes of a Norwegian family which settled in Vatnsdal, in Northern Iceland. It contains many mythological allusions, and the God Freyr plays a prominent rôle in it.

The Fostbræðra-saga relates the story of two foster-brothers of the eleventh century, and contains verses written by one of them; the Ljósvetnínga-saga relates occurrences of the latter part of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century. Its chief personages, Thorgeir Goði, Guðmund the Mighty, and their sons, are elsewhere known and celebrated. It contains important information concerning the institutions of Iceland; and the Saga of Gisli Sursson has some interesting features of heathen rites and ceremonies. Passing by many others attributed to this century, some of which contain valuable contributions to the history of heathendom in Iceland, we will notice a few of the most prominent Sagas of the thirteenth century.

1. Eyrbyggja-saga, the history of Hrolf, a priest of

Thor, and his race. He fled from Harald Hárfagri, and settled on a large bay in western Iceland, which he called "Breiðafjörð," *the Broad Firth.* Here he built a large temple to Thor, which he and his descendants presided over. Of these his great-grandson Snorri Goði appears as the prominent personage of the Saga. This Saga gives a clear view of the Old-Scandinavian worship of Thor, as it was transplanted to Iceland.

2. Laxdæla-saga, one of the most comprehensive, and in fullness of material, in the plan and in completeness of narration, perhaps the best. It covers the period of Olaf Tryggvason's reign, about the year 1000, and of the introduction of Christianity into Norway and Iceland. The history of that time, especially of the transition of the heathen life of the Northmen into the Christian, is finely represented in this Saga.

3. Sturlúnga-saga, or Íslendínga-saga hin mikla—"the Great Saga of the Icelanders," is the most detailed of all. It treats of the much-renowned race of the Sturlúngar, and relates their fortunes and their deeds from the beginning of the twelfth century until the year 1284. It therefore embraces a period much later than the times of heathendom, and is very important in the history of Iceland.

4. Arons-saga Hjörleifssonar is connected with the above Saga, Aron, the son of Hjörleif, being one of the few chieftains who supported Bishop Guðmund against the Sturlungs. He died in 1250.

5. Grettis-saga is very rich in events, but full of romantic and fabulous traits. The hero is Grettir

the Strong, an oft-mentioned Skald of the eleventh century, who somewhat resembles Egil in wild recklessness, but is less gifted as a poet.

Many more Sagas of the thirteenth century may be passed by here, as they, with few exceptions, are of secondary importance; and there is quite a large number from the fourteenth, and even some from the fifteenth century; but the later we come, the less interest they have for us, and the less reliable they are. Many of them are wholly supposititious, being not mere fictions, but forgeries. They seem to move upon historical ground, while they are in reality nothing but silly inventions and fables, which it would be a misnomer to call historical.

The *Historical Sagas* relating to the other Scandinavian countries, are generally more finished works than the preceding, being complete histories of a whole age or period. The Icelanders felt a strong attachment to their Mother Country, which they often visited, and they naturally were familiar with its traditions and passing events. They therefore labored as diligently upon its history as at their own, and as they had to collect and compare traditions and occurrences which were not living in the mouths of the people around them, they found it necessary to generalize and arrange the material—a work requiring superior learning and talents. Hence they wrote more general Histories and fewer local Sagas bearing upon those countries.

On the history of Denmark there are two large Sagas, which are master-pieces of Icelandic historiography, viz.:

1. Jómsvíkinga-saga, the history of the renowned Sea-rovers, who were established at Jómsburg, near the mouth of the Oder, and who were for a long time the terror of all the neighboring coasts. It begins with an account of the race of Palnatoki, the founder of Jómsburg, and relates how Sven was brought up by him, and incited to continual piratical excursions against the lands of his father, Harald Blátand, how King Harald fell by Palnatoki, and the latter, after Sven's ascension to the throne, was pursued by him, and built a large fortress on the Vendian coast, in which he formally established a community of Sea-rovers, and strengthened it by appropriate laws. In the second part it treats of the causes which brought about the celebrated expedition of the Jómsburgers against Norway, which it describes, and paints circumstantially the battle in which the power of the Sea-rovers was broken down by Hákon Jarl. This Saga was written in the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century, from authentic sources, as many Icelanders were in Hákon Jarl's army at the aforesaid battle. It is distinguished for the perspicuity with which circumstances and persons are represented, and is important, not only to Danish history, but also to Mythology, since the chief personages are the last representatives of Heathendom in the North, and consequently heathen sentiments and manners are everywhere presented.

2. Knytlínga-saga, a history of the Danish Kings from Harald Blátand to Knut VI., of whom the successors of Knut the Great were named "Knyt-

língar" (Knutides, descendants of Canute). It was written, partly from older sources, by Olaf Thordarsson (died 1259), who composed a fragment of the Prose Edda. Although the events mostly take place in Christian times, yet it is not wanting in poetic beauties, and even the greater part of the first chapter is taken from the lays of Eirik Jarl and Sven Estriðson, the Court Skalds of Knut the Great.

Of the Sagas relating to Norway we have:

1. Saga Olafs Tryggvasonar, Olaf Tryggvason's Saga, in two different works, both independent of Snorri's, and undertaken before it. One is by Monk Oddur (d. 1200), the other by Monk Gunlaug, a younger cotemporary of the former. Both were written in Latin, and of both we have only Icelandic translations. Olaf Tryggvason was the founder of Christianity in Norway, and in his history there are various references to Heathendom, which he was actively engaged in driving out by force. Both these works afford a rich mine for the mythologist, inasmuch as they unfold the decay of heathen life in the North, and its transition to Christianity. Gunlaug's work is also interesting from the great number of inlaid Skaldic Songs.

2. Saga Olafs hins Helga, the Saga of Olaf the Saint. This King continued the work of conversion begun by his predecessor, and hence this Saga has for us a similar interest to the preceding one, although in a less degree. It contains songs of Sighvat, Ottar the Swarthy, and others.

3. Heimskringla, the *World-Circle*,* the Chronicles of the Norwegian Kings, by Snorri Sturlason. Next to the Edda, this is the most celebrated work in the whole Icelandic literature. It begins as far back in the mythic times as memory reaches, while the other Icelandic histories usually begin with Harald Hárfagri, and it comes down to Magnus Erlingsson, A. D. 1176. It is not a primitive history, drawn immediately from the traditions and songs of the people, as was the case with many of the Sagas, but was constructed by Snorri from materials already blocked out in previously-existing Sagas. These Sagas contained a tolerably full history of Norway, in isolated fragments, which Snorri collected, modified, and combined with remarkable care and judgment, into one continuous historical work. This origin of the Heimskringla is shown in the circumstance that it is divided into different Sagas, as well as by certain variations and contradictions that occur in the different parts.†

Snorri's account has only an incidental interest for the mythologist where it treats of the later, purely Christian ages of Norway; it is more important where the downfall of the heathen life is represented, and highly interesting in the delineation of the mythic age—in the Ynglínga Saga.

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* This work has been thus named by the learned from the two principal words at the beginning: "Svá er sagt at *kringla heimsins.*" "It is said that the *circle of the world*, &c." In the MS. it is called "Æfi Noregs Konúnga," "Life of the Kings of Norway," or "Noregs Konúnga Sögur," "Sagas of the Kings of Norway."

† The Introduction begins: "á bók þessi *let ek rita* forna frásagnir." "In this book *I have caused* the ancient narratives *to be written*, &c.," as though he had only attended to the editing of it.

This gives an account of the first mythic race of Kings in Sweden and Norway, the Ynglíngar, and is a kind of Introduction. Snorri wrote it from Thjodolf's Ýnglínga-tal, and throughout the latter part of it he inlaid every important transaction with a strophe of that ancient poem. This portion of the work is of no historical value, and, in a mythological point of view, it becomes absurd in the earlier chapters, where the attempt is made to establish the Ynglínga history upon the history of the Gods, and to connect the two by means of foreign, Græco-Roman ideas and traditions. The other portions of the Heimskringla are adorned with fine poems, which impart a certain mythologic interest to the whole work.

It was continued by various authors, down to the time of Magnus the Law-mender; namely, in Sverris-saga, begun by the Abbot Carl Jonsson, and finished by Styrmir the Learned; and further, through four other Sagas, down to Magnus Lagabætis-Saga, written by Sturla Thordarsson, of which only a fragment remains. With Snorri's history, the masterpiece of Icelandic Historiography, and the pieces annexed to it, we conclude this brief sketch of the Saga literature of Iceland.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA BY THE NORTHMEN.

The restoration of Icelandic literature has brought to light some pages of history which are specially interesting to Americans—they are the accounts of the discovery of our country by the Northmen. The different manuscripts bearing on this subject, contain accounts which cannot be explained otherwise than by admitting the fact of discovery, and in many important circumstances they corroborate each other. They have all been collected by Prof. Charles C. Rafn, in the work entitled, "Antiquitates Americanæ, &c.," which was published in 1837, by him, through the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries of Copenhagen. These historical facts have now been several years before the world, and they are sometimes referred to in connection with the early history of America, yet in general they are but imperfectly known, and the references to them are sometimes incorrect. The following is an abstract of the "Antiquitates," by Professor Rafn:

Gardar the Dane, of Swedish origin, was the first Northman who discovered Iceland, in the year 863. A few out-places of the country had been visited previously, about seventy years before, by some

Irish hermits. Eleven years afterward, or in 874, the Norwegian Ingólf began the colonization of the country, which was continued during the space of sixty years. The colonists, many of whom belonged to the most illustrious and most civilized families in the North, established in Iceland a flourishing Republic. Here, on this distant island-rock, the Old-Norse language was preserved unchanged for centuries, and here in the *Eddas* were treasured those Folk-songs and Folk-myths, and in the *Sagas* those historical Tales and Legends, which the first settlers had brought with them from their Scandinavian mother-lands. Iceland was, therefore, the cradle of a historical literature of immense value.

The situation of the island and the relationship of the colony to foreign countries in its earlier period, compelled its inhabitants to exercise and develop their hereditary maritime skill and thirst for new discoveries across the great Ocean. As early as the year 877, Gunnbjörn saw, for the first time, the mountainous coast of Greenland. But this land was first visited by Erik the Red, in 983, who, three years afterwards, in 986, by means of Icelandic emigrants, established the first colony on its South-western shore, where afterward, in 1124, the Bishop's See, of Gardar, was founded, which subsisted for upwards of 300 years. The head firths or bays were named after the chiefs of the expedition. Erik the Red settled in Eriks-firth, Einar, Rafn and Ketil in the firths called after them, and Herjúlf on Herjúlfsnes. On a voyage from Iceland to Greenland in this same year (986), Bjarne, the son of the latter, was driven far out to sea towards the Southwest, and, for the first time, beheld the coasts of the American lands, afterwards visited and named by his countrymen. In order to examine these countries more narrowly, Leif the Fortunate, son of Erik the Red, undertook a voyage of discovery thither in the year 1000. He landed on the shores described by Bjarne, detailed the character of these lands more exactly, and gave them names according to their appearance: Helluland (Newfoundland) was so called from its flat stones, Markland (Nova Scotia) from its woods, and Vinland (New England) from its vines. Here he remained for some time, and constructed large houses, called after him Leifsbúðir (*Leif's Booths*). A German named Tyrker, who accompanied Leif on this voyage, was the man who found the wild-vines, which he recognized from having seen them in his native land, and Leif gave the country its name from this circumstance. Two years afterward Leif's brother Thorvald repaired thither, and in 1003 caused an expedition to be undertaken to the South, along the shore, but he was killed in the summer of 1004 on a voyage northward, in a skirmish with the natives.

The most distinguished, however, of all the first American discoverers is Thorfinn Karlsefne, an Icelander, whose genealogy is carried back in the Old-Northern annals to Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Scottish, and Irish ancestors, some of them of royal blood. In 1006 this chieftain, on a merchant-voyage, visited Greenland, and there married Gudrid, the widow of Thorstein (son of Erik the

Red), who had died the year before in an unsuccessful expedition to Vinland. Accompanied by his wife, who encouraged him to this voyage, and by a crew of 160 men on board three vessels, he repaired in the spring of 1007 to Vinland, where he remained for three years, and had many communications with the aborigines. Here his wife Gudrid bore him a son, Snorri,* who became the founder of an illustrious family in Iceland, which gave that island several of its first Bishops. His daughter's son was the celebrated Bishop Thorlak Runólfson, who published the first Christian Code of Iceland. In 1121 Bishop Erik sailed to Vinland from Greenland, doubtless for the purpose of strengthening his countrymen in their Christian faith.

The notices given by the old Icelandic voyage-chroniclers respecting the climate, the soil, and the productions of this new country, are very characteristic. Nay, we have even a statement of this kind as old as the eleventh century, from a writer not a Northman, Adam of Bremen; he states, on the authority of Sven Estriðson, King of Denmark, a nephew of Canute the Great, that the country got its name from the vine growing wild there. It is a remarkable coincidence in this respect, that its English re-discoverers, for the same reason, name the large island which is close off the coast *Martha's Vineyard.* Spontaneously growing wheat (maize or Indian corn) was also found in this country.

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* The celebrated Danish sculptor Thorvaldsen was a descend-

In the mean time it is the total result of the nautical, geographical, and astronomical evidences in the original documents, which places the situation of the countries discovered beyond all doubt. The number of days' sail between the several newly-found lands, the striking description of the coasts, especially the white sand-banks of Nova Scotia and the long beaches and downs of a peculiar appearance on Cape Cod (the Kjalarnes and Furðustrandir of the Northmen), are not to be mistaken. In addition hereto, we have the astronomical remark that the shortest day in Vinland was *nine* hours long, which fixes the latitude of 41 deg. 24 min. 10 sec., or just that of the promontories which limit the entrance to Mount Hope Bay, where Leif's booths were built, and in the district around which the old Northmen had their head establishment, which was named by them Hóp.

When we reflect that the strongest and most undeniable evidence has been adduced to prove the fact of an Icelandic-Norwegian discovery of our continent in the tenth century, it becomes a matter both of surprise and regret that some of our most lauded writers of American history should either leave the event entirely unnoticed, or dispose of it in some half-dozen well-rounded and skeptical sentences.

RELIGION OF THE NORTHMEN.

INTRODUCTION.

The Northmen, before their conversion to Christianity, and as far back in time as History is able to follow them, were the adherents of a Religion usually called the *Asa-Faith*, from the *Æsir*, the Gods concerning whom it taught. This Asa-Religion in its peculiar form may be considered as having sprung into being with the Germanic race, and as being, in its fundamental principles, inherited and propagated by the two branches of that race—the *Norræna* and the *German*—so that its essential doctrines were common to both, although in its farther development, by each of them, it followed a peculiar direction.

For the elucidation of the Asa-Faith in its Germanic form, the resources, even though not wholly insignificant, are yet difficult to be employed, as they are widely scattered, and have to be looked for among much-corrupted popular legends, and in manuscripts of the middle ages, where they are occasionally found interpolated, and where we should least expect to meet with them.* But in its

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* Jacob Grimm's diligence and penetration have thrown new light on this subject in his excellent work, "Deutsche Mythologie."

Norræna form the Asa-Faith is far better known. Here we have for our guide not only a number of religious lays, composed while the Asa-Faith still flourished, but even a complete religious system, written down, it is true, in Christian times, yet, according to all evidence, without the Christian ideas having had any especial influence in the delineation, or having materially corrupted it.

The lays are found in the collection usually called *The Older Edda* or *Sæmund's Edda*, which latter name is given to it because it was collected by the Icelander Sæmund the Learned (b. 1056, d. 1133). The Religious System is found in *the Later Edda*, also called *Snorri's Edda*, from the supposed author or compiler, the renowned Saga-man Snorri Sturlason (b. 1178, d. 1241).

Upon these manuscripts is based the following brief sketch of the Religious Doctrines of the Asa-Faith. But a delineation of the Religious System of the Northmen in Heathendom requires not merely a representation of the predominant dogmas of the Faith; it must likewise embrace an interpretation of them, so far as it can be given with any certainty, and finally a picture of the religion such as it actually appeared in life,—in the worship of the gods, in the religious institutions, in the popular notions concerning the gods, and in the heathen superstition generally.

In the interpretation of the Asa-myths, very important services have been rendered by many learned men of modern times, and their works have been constantly referred to in that part of our undertaking, although by no means slavishly followed.

The most important modern works, which present the Asa-myths with their interpretations, are the following:—

Finn Magnusen:—"Oversættelse af den ældre Edda," 1821–23, 4 vols. 8vo.; "Edda-Lære," 1824–26, 4 vols. 8vo.; "Lexicon Mythologicum," appended to the third part of the great Arna Magnæan edition of the Older Edda.

N. F. S. Grundtvig:—"Nordens Mythologie eller Sindbilled-Sprog, historisk poetisk udviklet." 2nd ed. Copenh. 1836.

M. Hammerich:—"Om Ragnaroks Mythen og dens Betydning i den oldnordiske Religion." Copenh. 1836.

N. M. Petersen:—"Danmarks Historie i Hedenold." Copenh. 1834–37. 3 parts. The Asa-Doctrine is treated of in the third part.

E. G. Geijer:—"Svea-Rikes Häfder," Stockh. 1825, and his "Svenska Folkets Historia," Örebro, 1832–36, where the Asa-Doctrine is treated of in the first part.

F. J. Mone:—"Geschichte des Heidenthums im nördlichen Europa," 1822–23. 2 vols. 8vo. The Asa-Doctrine is presented in the first part.

Jac. Grimm:—"Deutsche Mythologie." Göttingen, 1835. 2nd enlarged edition. Göttingen, 1844.

P. A. Munch:—"Nordens Gamle Gude- og Helte-Sagn." Christiania, 1840.

For a representation of the religious life of the Northmen, our old Norse-Icelandic manuscripts present a rich source, which has not yet been fully exhausted.

It is the Asa-Faith, such as it was understood and cherished by the Northmen of Norway and Iceland, which the Old-Norse manuscripts properly present to us, and from this point of view it shall be considered here. We have, indeed, no reason to doubt that the other two branches of the Norræna family—the Swedes and Danes—professed in the main points the same faith, followed the same religious customs, and had the same religious institutions; but we do not know, with certainty, what these were in detail, for the reliable inland sources of information are wanting; and although the ancient Norse-Icelandic manuscripts not unfrequently treat of heathen-religious affairs in Sweden and Denmark, yet it is only occasional, and is, besides, almost always such that the conception is evidently Norwegian, and the delineation quite too much adapted to the existing institutions of Norway for us to draw from them any decisive conclusions.

The following Exposition will, therefore, more especially embrace the Religious Institutions of Norway and Iceland during heathen times; and, as before hinted, it will be divided into three Parts: the first containing the Dogmas of the Asa-Faith; the second, the Interpretation of the Asa-Doctrines; the third, the Manifestation of the Asa-Faith in the Popular Life of the Northmen.

I.

DOGMAS OF THE ASA-FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE WORLD.

In the beginning of time there were two worlds: in the South was Muspell, light and flaming; over it rules Surtur, who sits at its boundaries with his flaming sword; in the North was Niflheim, cold and dark, with the fountain Hvergelmir in its midst, where the Dragon Niðhögg dwells. Between these worlds was Ginunga-gap—the Yawning Chasm—still as the windless air. From Hvergelmir flowed forth ice-cold venom-streams. The rime from these streams met in Ginunga-gap with Muspell's sparks; then the rime-drops were quickened by the power of the heat, and the Jötun Ýmir came into being, who of himself produced a race of evil Jötuns—the Frost-Giants or Mountain-Giants.

With Ýmir came to life the cow Auðhumla, by whose milk he was nourished. The cow licked the salt rime-clumps, and then came forth Buri, a great, a beautiful, and mighty being. His son was Bör, and

Bör's sons, by the Jötun-woman Bestla, Bolthorn's daughter, were Odin (Óðinn), Vili, and Ve. Odin became the father of the bright and beautiful Æsir, the ruling Gods of Heaven and Earth; therefore he is called All-father (Alfaðir).

The sons of Bör slew the giant Ýmir, and in his blood the whole race of Frost-Giants was drowned, all but one pair who escaped, and from whom new Jötun-races descended. Bör's sons carried the slain Ýmir out into the middle of Ginunga-gap; there they made the earth of his body, the sea of his blood, the mountains of his bones, and the trees of his hair; of his skull they created the sky, which they arched high above the earth and adorned with sparks from Muspell; but the brain they scattered in the air and it became the gloomy clouds. Around about the earth's surface they caused the deep sea to flow, and upon its utmost strand the Jötuns, who had escaped, took up their abodes in Jötunheim and Útgarð. As a protection against them, the bland, creating powers made from Ýmir's brows a breastwork around the inmost earth—a citadel called Miðgarð. From Heaven to Earth they set up the bridge Bifröst, or the Rainbow.

The black, dark Night (Nótt), of Jötun lineage, became by the Æsir-son Delling, the mother of Day (Dagr), who was beautiful as his father. Odin placed the mother and son in the heavens, and commanded them to drive every day and night (*dögn*) over the earth. Night rides before with the horse Hrimfaxi (Frost-mane), who every morning bedews the earth with the foam from his bits. Day follows after with the horse Skinfaxi (Shining-mane), whose mane scatters light over air and earth.

The Æsir created Sól and Máni (the Sun and Moon) out of the sparks of Muspell, but they appointed the children of Mundilfori to drive their chariots across the heavens. The daughter drives the chariot of the Sun, but the son drives that of the Moon. They speed swiftly onward, for two Jötuns in the guise of wolves pursue Sól and Máni in order to devour them.

Dwarves (Dvergar) were quickened as maggots in Ymir's flesh. By the command of the Gods they received the form and understanding of men; but their abode was in the earth and the rocks. Four Dwarves—Austri, Vestri, Norðri, and Suðri—were appointed by the Gods to bear up the sky. At the northern extremity sits the Jötun Hræ-svelgur, in the guise of an eagle; his wing-strokes are the cause of storms.

There were not yet any human beings upon the earth, when once, as the three Æsir, Odin, Hænir, and Lóðurr were walking along the sea-shore, they there found two trees and created from them the first human pair—the man Ask, and the woman Embla. Odin gave them spirit, Hænir, understanding, and Lóðurr gave blood and fair complexion. The newly-created pair received Miðgarð of the Æsir for their abode; and from Ask and Embla is descended the whole human family.

CHAPTER II.

PRESERVATION OF THE WORLD.

The ash Yggdrasill is the noblest of all trees; its ever-green branches encompass all the world. It grows up from three roots. The one is in the fountain Hvergelmir in Niflheim, at which the dragon Niðhögg gnaws; the second root is in Jötunheim; the third with the Æsir in heaven. In the top of the ash sits a very wise eagle; four harts run among its branches and bite off the buds; while up and down the trunk goes the squirrel Ratatösk, which bears words of malice between the eagle and Niðhögg. Under the root which shoots up from Jötunheim, is the well of the wise Jötun Mímir. Here is kept Odin's eye, which he pledged for a drink from the well; and every morning Mímir drinks from his glittering horn the mead which flows over Odin's pledge. Under the root of the ash which sprouts from heaven is the sacred Urdar-fount (Urðar-brunnr), by which the Gods have their judgment seat, whither they ride every day over Bifröst. By this fountain the three great Nornir have their seat: the maidens Urður, Verðandi, and Skuld. They nourish the tree by sprinkling over its body with the purifying waters of the fountain. They deal out life and rule the fates. Their messengers, now good, now evil, accompany man from birth till death, and create his good and evil fate. Nothing can change the doom of the Norns.

CHAPTER III.

THE GODS AND THEIR ABODES.

In heaven is Ásgarð, the abode of the Gods. In its midst is the Field of Ida (Iða-völlr), the Assembling-place of the Gods, and Odin's High-Seat Hliðskjálf, from whence he looks forth over all the worlds. But above the heaven of the Æsir reaches a higher heaven, and in the highest stands the imperishable gold-roofed hall, Gimli, brighter than the sun.

Odin or Alfaðir is the highest and eldest of the Æsir; his wife is Friga, the daughter of Fjörgyn; from them descends the race of Æsir. Odin's hall is the great Valhalla (Valhöll). Spears support its ceiling, with shields it is roofed, and coats of mail adorn its benches. Thither, and to Vingólf, the hall of the Goddesses, Odin invites all men wounded by arms, all in battle fallen; therefore he is called Valfaðir, the Father of the Slain; and his invited guests are called Einherjar. It is their pastime to fight and slay each other every day; but they revive again before evening, and ride home reconciled to Valhalla, where they are refreshed with the flesh of the boar Sæhrímnir, and where the Valkyrjur reach them mead. By the side of Odin stand two wolves, Geri and Freki; upon his shoulders sit two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, which regularly fly out and return with tidings from the whole world. His horse is the gray eight-footed Sleipnir. Odin's names are manifold; for he never calls himself by the same name when he journeys among the people.

Thor (Þórr) is the second of the Æsir, a son of Odin, and his own daughter Jörð (Earth). ~~He is the~~ strongest of the Gods; his dwelling is Thrúðvangar or Thrúðheim; his hall the immense Bilskirnir. To him come bondsmen after death. Thor drives in a car which is drawn by two goats, and is therefore called Öku-Þórr—*the Driving Thor.* He is also called Hlórriði—*the Fire-Charioteer.* The mountains shake and are riven asunder, and the earth burns beneath his chariot. Fire flashes from his eyes when he is angry. The Belt of Strength (megin-gjörð) redoubles his Asa-might. Unceasingly he fights against the Jötuns, who tremble at his hammer Mjölnir, smithied by skillful Dwarves. His wife is Sif, with golden hair. The boy Thjálfi and the girl Röskva, brother and sister, go with him on his travels.

Baldur is a son of Odin and Friga. He is so beautiful that all things are made light by him; he is beloved by all and is the Comforter of the unfortunate. His wife is Nanna and his dwelling is Breiðablik, where nothing impure is found.

Njörð was born in Vanaheim among the wise Vanir, but was received among the Æsir when the Vanir, in a treaty with the latter, gave him as a hostage and received Hænir in his stead. Njörð rules the course of the winds, stills the sea and fire, and deals out riches among men. He is invoked in

Sea-faring and Fishing. His wife is Skaði, daughter of the Jötun Thjassi. But Njörð and Skaði agree not together. Njörð dwells in Nóatún, by the sea; Skaði keeps to her father's dwelling at Thrymheim, where she runs upon snow-shoes over the mountains, and shoots the wild beasts with her bow.

Frey is the son of Njörð, and rules over rain and sunshine and the earth's fruitfulness. He is invoked for fruitful seasons, for peace and riches. He is bland and good; he causes sorrow to no one, but delivers the bondsmen from their chains. His dwelling is Alfheim. He drives with the boar Gullinbursti (Golden Bristles), or sails in the noble ship Skiðblaðnir, a work of the Dwarves. In order to obtain the Jötun-daughter Gerða, whom he loved, he gave away his good sword, and hence he is weaponless in the Æsir's last battle.

Týr, the One-Handed, is the boldest among the Æsir; brave men are to invoke him.

Bragi, with the flowing beard, a son of Odin, is the God of Poetry. His wife is Iduna, who keeps the apples of which the Gods partake, that they may never grow old.

Heimdall, the white God with the golden teeth, the son of nine Jötun-virgins, is the Watcher of the Gods, and dwells in Himinbjörg, which stands where Bifröst's bridge approaches Heaven. He is more watchful than a bird, and sees a hundred miles away. When he blows in his trumpet Gjallarhorn it resounds throughout all worlds.

The rest of the Æsir are: the blind, powerful

Höður, a son of Odin; Viðarr, with iron shoes, Odin's son by the Jötun-woman Griða, is called the Silent God. Next to Thor, he is the strongest, and dwells in the desert Landviði. Ali or Vali, the sure marksman, is a son of Odin and Rinda, born in the western hall. Ullur, Thor's step-son, the God of hunting and snow-shoe running, is invoked for success in the duel; his dwelling is in Ýdalir. Forseti, the son of Baldur, settles all disputes among gods and men; he dwells in Glitnir, whose roof of silver rests on golden columns.

Of the Goddesses (Ásynjur, *sing.* Ásynja) Friga is the highest. She is the daughter of Fjörgyn, and the wife of Odin. Her dwelling place is in Fensalir.

Next to her is Freyja, Njörð's daughter, sister of Frey, the Goddess of Love. Two cats draw her chariot. Her dwelling is Fólkvangar, her hall, Sessrymnir. When she rides out to battle, she shares half the fallen with Odin. Her husband Óður travels far away; Freyja weeps golden tears of longing after him. She is called Vanadís—the Vanir-goddess, and has many other names besides, which she received as she wandered about among unknown tribes, seeking her lost Óður.

Saga dwells in the great Sökkvabekk under the cool waves; there she drinks with Odin every day from golden vessels.

There are besides these many Goddesses of inferior dignity, some in Friga's service and some in Freyja's.

The Valkyrjur are sent by Odin to every battle, to choose guests for Valhalla and to turn the victory. Among their number is Skuld, the youngest of the Nornir. Surrounded by lightning's glare and bearing bright spears, they ride in bloody armor through the air and over the seas. When their steeds shake their manes, dew falls in the deep valleys and hail upon the high forests.

The ruler of the sea is Ægir, also called Gýmir and Hler. He is a Jötun, though a friend of the Æsir. When the latter visit him, his hall is illuminated with shining gold. His wife is Rán. She has a net with which she catches seafarers. The daughters of Ægir and Rán are the Waves: they are unfriendly to voyagers and strive to overturn ships.

CHAPTER IV.

PROPAGATION OF EVIL; DECLINE AND FALL OF THE WORLD.

In the first ages of the world there was a glorious time of peace among the gods and men. But Jötun-women came to Ásgard, and the Æsir formed connections with them. Then happiness was destroyed; the air was poisoned with wickedness, and strife was begun in heaven and on the earth, to continue until the destruction of both. The Jötuns attack the Æsir, now with strength and now with cunning: nought but the power of Thor is able to prevail over them.

The author of the greatest misfortunes which have befallen the gods and men, is Loki or Loptr. He is of Jötun descent, but was received among the Æsir, and even in the morning of time he was the foster-brother of Odin. He is of a fair countenance but evil in disposition. He is called the Slanderer of the Gods, the source of deceitful cunning, a disgrace among gods and men. He accompanied the Æsir, and they often made use of his strength and cunning; but he still oftener acted in concert with the Jötuns for the destruction of the Æsir.

Loki had three children by the Jötun-woman Angurboða: the Fenris-wolf, the World-serpent (Miðgarðs-ormr, also called Jörmungandr), and Hel, or Death. The Æsir knew that this offspring of Loki should bring upon them great calamities; they therefore bound the wolf on a desert island, and set a sword within its outstretched jaws; the Miðgarð-serpent they cast out into the deep sea, where it encircles the whole earth's surface and bites itself in the tail. But Hel was hurled headlong down into Niflheim, and Al-father commanded that all who died of sickness and old age should go to her. Her dwelling, Helheim, is large but frightful. She is half pale-blue and half white, grim and ferocious of aspect.

The greatest grief was brought by Loki into the whole world, when he by his deceit slew Baldur the Good. The Æsir knew that danger was threatening Baldur, and his mother Friga took oath of all Nature that nothing should harm him. But she forgot a tender twig, the mistletoe. Loki tore this up and persuaded the blind Hödur to throw it at his brother Baldur in sport. Loki himself guides Hödur's hand and Baldur is killed. The Æsir are struck dumb with grief and horror. At last Friga sends Odin's swain Hermoð to Hel, in order to ransom Baldur from Helheim, and Hel promises to release him if all Nature bewails his death. It is also done; men and animals, the earth and even the solid rocks shed tears. All but an old Jötun woman, who will not weep, and therefore Hel keeps back her prey. But this Jötun woman was the disguised Loki, who was the greatest cause of evil among the Æsir. Nanna, the wife of Baldur, died of grief, and was burned upon her husband's funeral pile; but Odin's son, Vali, although but one night old, avenged Baldur's death by slaying Hödur, his murderer.

Loki, pursued by the Æsir, now fled up to a mountain from which he could see to all corners of the world, and when he saw the Æsir drawing near in their search after him, he changed himself into the likeness of a salmon, and hid himself under a waterfall. But Odin saw him from Hliðskjálf, and the Æsir caught him. They then bound him with the intestines of his own son Nari, upon three sharp rocks in a dark cave, and Skaði fastened a venomous serpent over his head, whose poison should drip down into his face. Sigyn, his faithful wife, stands beside him and holds a vessel under the venom-drops; but when it is full and she goes away to empty it, the venom drips down into Loki's face, and then he writhes himself so that the whole earth shakes. Thence come the earthquakes. Thus shall Loki lie bound until the end of the world.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GODS AND THE WORLD.

Upon a time the world shall be convulsed, and the Æsir destroyed in Ragnarökk, or the Twilight of the Gods. The growing depravity and strife in the world proclaim the approach of this great event. Winters rage without any intervening summer, with furious storms, with snows and darkness. The sun and moon are swallowed by the pursuing Jötun-wolves, and heaven is sprinkled with blood. The bright stars vanish, the earth shakes, and the mountains are hurled together with a crash. Then all bonds and chains are broken, and the Fenris-wolf runs loose. The Miðgarð-serpent writhes in Jötun-rage, and seeks the land across the tumultuous waves. The ship Naglfár flies and bears over the sea the Frost-giant's hosts, led on by the Jötun Hrym. The loosened Loki also comes at the head of the troops of Hel. The Fenris-wolf rushes forth with outstretched jaws, which fill the space between heaven and earth; the Miðgarð-serpent on its side blows out venom over air and sea. In the midst of this confusion the heavens are rent asunder, and through the opening the sons of Muspell ride forth in radiant array. At their head is Surtur, surrounded with flames; his fire-sword flashes brighter than the sun. They all haste on toward the battlefield, the immense plains of Vígríð.

Heimdall now arises and blows with all his strength in Gjallar-horn. The gods all assemble together. Yggdrasill's ash is shaken, and everything in heaven and earth is filled with terror. The Æsir and Einherjar arm themselves and rush forth to battle. Odin rides at their head and meets the Fenris-wolf; Thor fights at his side against the Miðgarð-serpent. Freyr combats with Surtur, but falls, for he has no sword. Loki and Heimdall slay each other. Thor kills the Miðgarð-serpent, but it vomits forth upon him a flood of venom. He gives way nine steps backwards, but falls dead to the ground. The Fenris-wolf swallows Odin, but falls in turn before the strong Viðarr, who splits its jaws asunder. Then Surtur slings his fire over the world. Smoke wreathes up around the all-nourishing tree, the high flames play against the heavens, and earth, consumed, sinks down beneath the sea.

CHAPTER VI.

GIMLI AND NASTRÖND; REGENERATION OF THE WORLD.

The gold-roofed Gimli which shines brighter than the sun, passes not away in the great world-conflagration. After Ragnarökk the good shall all be gathered thither to rejoice for evermore. But the wicked shall be hurled down into Náströnd—the Strand of the Dead—which lies around Hvergelmir. There shall they wade through thick venom-streams and be tormented by the dragon Niðhögg.

But the world is not destroyed forever. A new earth, eternally green and fair, shall shoot forth out of the sea. Viðarr and Vali, who have lived through the fire and the flood, are joined by Thor's sons Moði and Magni, who have their father's hammer; and Baldur and Hödur return from the abodes of Hel. All assemble and converse together of former things; they find the golden tablets which the Æsir once possessed, and they adopt their ancient customs of the plains of Ida. The Sun before her destruction bore a daughter who, more beautiful than her mother, wanders in her path through the renovated world. Líf and Lífthrasir lay hidden in Hoðmímir's wood during the conflagration, and had the morning dew for their food; from them shall descend a new race of men who shall spread over the whole earth. All evil shall cease, and no sorrow nor trouble shall any more prevail upon the new-born earth.

Then shall the Mighty One come from above, he who rules over all, whose name man dares not to utter. He comes in his power to the great judgment-seat; he will appease all strife and establish a holy peace which shall endure eternally. But the foul dragon, the venom-spotted Niðhöggr, flies away over the plains and sinks out of sight, bearing death upon his wings.

II.

EXPOSITION OF THE ASA DOCTRINE.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ASA DOCTRINE IN GENERAL.

CONCERNING the origin and significance of the Asa doctrine, there has been, and still is, a great variety of opinions.

Taken as a whole, some regard it as a monotheistic system in the beginning, which degenerated into polytheism by the extravagant fancies of the human understanding. They look for its first basis either in an immediate divine revelation, imparted to mankind in the beginning, and consequently common to all nations and all religions;—or else in a purer religion, which in a remote antiquity was peculiar to the first progenitors of the Iranic or Indo-European race, and which, under many corruptions and deteriorations, was transmitted through the various branches of the race, so that the fundamental principles are more or less distinctly seen in the religious systems of all the heathen tribes descended from them; but how this purer primitive Iranic religion originated—whether by immediate revelation or by the continual development of the human soul —is not taken into consideration. Others assume that the Asa doctrine, as an independent whole, was developed among the Germanic classes from the very lowest point of polytheism into a religious system in which polytheism was inclining to yield before monotheistic ideas, which the clearer heads among the people had gradually risen up to by their own strength of mind and by the natural progress of polytheism.

In regard to the real object of the Asa myths,—some have sought it in the history of the Germanic race, especially of the Norræna branch, others in the general phenomena of Nature, others again in man's peculiar nature, especially in a moral point of view. There has thus been developed a historical, a physical, and an ethical interpretation; but seldom has any interpreter followed one of these directions exclusively, the greater number have united them, with one or another of them the predominant.

Finally, in regard to the outer form of the Asa doctrine, some consider it a complete allegory, whose images, even in the minutest particulars, they strive to trace back to reality, while others seek only to unravel the prominent ideas of the myths from their poetic dress, believing it in vain to attempt to trace the images through all the mazes of fantasy.

As to the first theory, we find a certain fundamental idea pervading all the known religious systems belonging to the people of the Iranic race, which points towards a common origin for them. The Asa doctrine of the origin of the gods and the world, of the strife between Good and Evil, of the destruction and regeneration of the world and the gods, if we do not too closely follow the figures by which it is expressed, has an unmistakable similarity to the ancient Indian and Median myths concerning the same subject,—a similarity which we cannot well explain satisfactorily except by their origin in a common source. We may therefore assume that the Germanic race, when it separated from kindred races as an independent whole, had already conceived—although indistinctly—those ideas which it afterward expressed and farther developed in accordance with its peculiar character, and connected with a mythology built upon its own notions of the world, which gradually obscured the monotheistic ideas—at least with the mass—and set them in the background for polytheism. The Asa doctrine, in its peculiarity, seems thus to have sprung up with the Germanic race from certain fundamental religious ideas common to the whole Iranic family.

Concerning the second theory it may be said that the historical interpretation of the Asa doctrine is very ancient. The assumption of a historical Odin and historical Æsir, of an earthly Ásgard on the plains of the Tanaïs, &c., had doubtless its first basis in the efforts of the Northmen and the Icelanders to impart to the Asa doctrine—which was so important to their Skaldic minstrelsy—such a turn that, without offense to Christianity, it might be kept in remembrance and made use of by the Skalds. Snorri Sturlason's influence opened the way for this interpretation among the historians of the eighteenth century, who did not, however, content themselves with *one* historical Odin, but assumed three or four successive ones, and considered the Æsir sometimes as a tribe of people, sometimes as an order of priesthood, who wandered into the North from the banks of the Tanaïs. A stricter criticism of the sources of our ancient history has, in latter times, revealed these errors and thereby given a death-blow to the purely historical interpretation of the Asa doctrine. In its stead, the physical interpretation of the Asa myths has become the prevailing one, and it seems indeed to present itself to every unprejudiced mind. Even the mythic names point distinctly in this direction. The Asa doctrine expresses the conception which a powerful and imaginative, though uncultivated people formed of divinity through its diversified activity in Nature,—its conception of the supersensual in a bodily and human form.

Finally, as to the third theory: it seems to lie in the character of a greater part of the Asa myths, that they are not allegories representing ideas clear to the mind which first set them forth, and were clothed in a dress perceptible to the senses merely to be made intelligible to the mass;—consequently we cannot pursue the figure to the utmost in order to seek in it a real significance. The figure may here in most cases be assumed as co-existent with the idea itself, and to be almost as real as it. It thus went on continually producing of itself new figures, often bearing no relation to the original idea, and to which we may apply our skill in vain, in the attempt to find a deeper meaning.

On these views of the Asa Faith in general, are based the following interpretations of its most prominent myths.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE THEORY OF CREATION.

THE Asa doctrine supposes two primitive worlds; the Fire World—Muspell or Muspelheim*—in the south, which in the Eddas signifies *above*, and the dark, Mist-World—Nifiheim†—in the north, or *below*. In the former sits enthroned the Fire-Being Surtur;‡ in the deepest abyss of the latter, in Hvergelmir§—the *Ancient Cauldron*, dwells the Dragon Niðhögg‖—the *Gloomy Hewer* or *Gnawer*—two primitive beings, each in his nature corresponding to the world in which he rules; the former light and life-giving, the latter dark and deadly. From the Mist-World's dripping coolness (Elivágar,[*] *Venom streams*, *Hail streams*), rise up frost-vapors. In the vast empty space lying between the two worlds, in Ginunga-gap,[†] the *Yawning Abyss*, these vapors meet the sparks of the Fire-World. The dead, cold matter is quickened by the power of Fire, and the huge, shapeless Jötun[‡] Ýmir[§]—the *Roaring, Foaming*—comes forth, the first, chaotic World-mass. This living mass produces of himself many similar, frost-cold, stone-like, shapeless beings, the Hrímthursar[‖] and Bergrisar[¶]—*Frost giants* and *Mountain giants.* In all these forms Evil is still predominant. All are more nearly allied to the world of Cold and Darkness. It is only the lower, the *physical* world-life which moves in them.

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* Probably derived from múgr, a crowd; and spell, cognate with spilla, to destroy; whence it may signify the Destruction of the Multitude; in reference to the agency in destroying the human world. Grimm points out the name in the *Old-German* under the forms muspilli, mudspelli, denoting a general conflagration, which shows that the Germanic race had in the main points the same views as the Norræna.

† Nifl, cogn. with the *Germ.* Nebel, *Lat.* nebula; hence, the Nebulous Home.

‡ For Svertir, from sverta, to blacken, from his fire-like, scorching nature. According to Grimm, Surtr is cogn. with svartr; *Swed.* svart; *Dan.* sort; *Goth.* svarts: *Germ.* schwarz; *Engl.* swart, swarthy.

§ Hver, a cauldron; also, a hot spring. Grimm derives gelmir from gjalla, to resound; cogn. with *A.-S.* giellan; *Engl.* yell.

‖ From höggva, to hew; and nið, obscurity, or nið, malignity.

But a better being, although of animal nature—the Cow Auðhumla[**]—came into existence with the first Frost-Jötun, as his nurse. This power, which nourishes the chaotic World-mass, calls forth at the same time by its refining agency—by licking the Rime-clumps—a higher spiritual World-life, which unfolds itself through several links—through Buri the *Bearing*, and Burr* the *Born*—until it has gained power sufficient to overcome chaotic matter—to kill Ýmir and his offspring.

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[*] Él, a shower, hail shower; vágr, a stream.

[†] Gin, a yawning, an abyss; gina, to gape.

[‡] Jötunn, iotunn, a giant, cogn. with eta; *A.-S.* etan, to eat; corresponding Old-Germanic terms: *A.-S.* éoten; *L. Germ.* etan; *H. Germ.* ezan; *Goth.* itans; *Old Engl.* etin, ettin; *Scotch*, ettyn, eyttyn.

[§] Ým, ýmia, to roar; ýmr, a confused sound, as the clang of metals or the rustling of trees.

[‖] Þurs, perhaps cogn. with þurr, dry, barren (*Germ.* dürr); the corresponding *Anglo-Saxon* name was þyrs; *H. Germ.* durs, or turs; *Goth.* þaurs.

[¶] Risi, a giant; from rís, rísa, to rise, tower up.

[**] Or Auðhumbla. Some derive it from auðr, rich; and hum, moisture; others from auðr, void, vacant (*Dan.* öde); and húm, darkness.

This high conquering World-life is Divinity itself, which now goes forth as creative power in a threefold form—as Spirit, Will or Power, and Holiness—in the brothers Oðinn, Vili, and Ve. The *Spirit* quickens, the *Will* arranges, and *Holiness* banishes the Impure and Evil.† It is, however, only in the creation of the world that these three beings are represented as coöperating. Vili and Ve are not mentioned again; they are blended together again in the all-embracing World-spirit—in Odin. He is the Essence of the World, the Almighty Ás; he alone is Al-father, from whom all the other superior, world-directing beings, the Æsir, are descended.‡

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* Buri, burr, bör, derived from bera, to bear, bring forth; cogn. with *A.-S.* beran: whence also the *Danish* Barn and *Scottish* bairn, a child.

† Óðinn; *A.-S.* Vóden; *L. Germ.* Wódan; *H. Germ.* Wuotan; *Goth.* Vódans; *Fris.* Wéda. The word is cogn. with veð, óð, vaða, to wade, go through, and with Óðr, mind, understanding; hence denotes Spirit, the All-pervading (*Deut. Mythol.*). Vili signifies Will; Ve, holiness.

‡ Ás, *plur.* Æsir; *fem.* Ásynja, *pl.* Ásynjur. The corresponding Germanic names are: *A.-S.* ós. *pl.* és; *Goth.* ans. *pl.* anseis; cogn. with the *Celtic* Es, Esus; *Old Etruscan*, Æs, Ais, Æsar; *Pers.* Ized. Grimm remarks that a cognate expression was in all

By the creation the Elements are separated—Ymir's body is parceled out—and organic life begins. But the chaotic powers, though conquered, are not destroyed,—a Jötun escapes, and from him come forth new Jötun races. Disturbing and deadly influences are perceptible everywhere in Nature. They are the manifestations of the hostile disposition of the Jötuns toward the Æsir, and of their struggles to destroy the work of the latter. The Jötuns have been forced to fly to the outermost deserts around the surface of the earth—to Útgarð, the *Outer Ward* or inclosure—and here they have their proper home—Jötunheim; but they manage also to sneak in within the barrier which the Æsir made as a defense for the earth, and they get into Miðgarð.* They dwell here in the rugged mountains, in the ice-clad Jökulls, and in the barren deserts, everywhere where any unfruitfulness prevails. Their agency is perceptible in the devastating storms, caused by the wing-strokes of the Jötun-eagle in the North,† it is felt in winter's cold, in

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the Old-Germanic Languages (*Deut. Myth. p.* 22). It is probably cogn. with vesa, an older form of vera, to be, and originally signified *Being*, as a distinctive appellation of the Gods.

* Miðgarðr, the Middle-Ward; corresponds with *Goth.* midjungards; *Old Germ.* mittilgart; *A.-S.* middangeard, middeweard. The *Norse* miðr is cogn. with the *Goth.* midums, midia; *Germ.* mitte, mittel; *A.-S.* midd, midlen; *Engl.* middle, middling, mean; *Sansk.* madhyam, medhi; *Zend* meias; *Pers.* mijan; *Gr.* μέρος, &c. Gar, gard, garðr, and cognate words in the Indo-European languages, signified an inclosure, fence; hence the English words: girth, to gird, garden, guard, ward, yard, court, &c.

† This Storm-eagle's name Hræsvelgr, signifies: the Swallower of the Dead; from hræ; *A.-S.* hræow; a corpse; and svelgja; *Dan.* svælge; *A.-S.* swelgan; to swallow, gorge.

snow and ice, in all the powers of Nature which are unfriendly to fruitfulness and life.

The living world was also the work of the Æsir. The Earth, lying as a round disc in the middle point, was under their special protection. They sometimes descend thither from their celestial abodes, and then the rainbow—Bifröst,[*] the *Tremulous Way*—forms their bridge.

The representation of Night as the mother of Day corresponds with the rest of the theory of the origin of the world. Darkness is the primeval state in which Ýmir and his progeny moved. Night belonged therefore to the Jötuns. Day first comes forth with the light Æsir, as a son of the Jötun-born Night and the Æsir-son Delling, the *Dawn*.[†]

The bright heavenly bodies were sparks of Muspell, set by the Æsir in the vault of heaven to measure time. These also are hated by the chaotic powers. The Sun and Moon never have rest in their course by reason of the pursuing Jötun-wolves, who try to swallow them.

Within the Earth there were powers moving which were fragments of the chaotic life—Dwarves[‡] swarmed forth as maggots in Ýmir's flesh.

The Æsir improved them—gave them the form and understanding of men—but bound them to the caverns of the dark Earth, where they are busied with metals and work them. They were imagined to be dark as their home, and were therefore called Svartálfar—*Dark Elves*—and their dwellings in the earth, Svartálfaheimr.

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[*] Formed from bifa (*Dan.* bæve), to tremble; and röst, anciently a rest, a measure of distance on a road, and then, a road itself.

[†] Dellingr, for deglingr, diminutive of dagr, day.

[‡] Dvergr, *pl.* dvergar; *A.-S.* dveorg; *Old Germ.* tuerc; *Goth.* dvairgs (*Deut. Mythol.*).

The Eddas make no mention of the creation of animals, which, however, the Asa doctrine connected immediately with that of plants. Man is the last and most perfect work of the creative power. In the creation of man, as well as of the world, the Divine power appears in a threefold form. The three Æsir, Odin, Hænir, and Lóðurr, create the first human pair out of two Ash trees, whence the names Ask and Embla,* and each one imparts to them a gift corresponding to his own nature. Odin gives them spirit (önd), the spiritual life; he is himself the Spirit of the World, of which man's is a reflection. Hænir, *Light*, gives understanding (óðr), the light of the soul. Lóðurr, *Fire*,† gives them the warm blood and the blushing color, together with the burning keenness of the senses. The Æsir gave man, their favorite creation, a dwelling place in Mid-Earth (in Miðgarð), which was secured against the Jötuns. Hence it was also called Mannheim, man's home or world.

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* Askr; *Dan.* Ask; *Germ.* Esche; *A.-S.* Æsc; an ash tree Embla may have denoted another species of Ash, which the peasants still regard as a female tree. Grimm says embla, emla, signifies a busy woman, from amr, ambr, aml, ambl, assiduous labor. The words possibly bear the same relation to each other as Meshia and Meshiane, the ancient Persian names for the first man and woman, who were also formed from trees.

† Lóðurr is cogn. with the *Germ.* lodern, and denotes the blazing fire. This is without doubt the same being who is elsewhere called Loki or Loptr.

Herewith is the Creation ended. The living world stands perfect, protected by the bland Æsir, with whom it came into life; threatened and attacked by the cold, dark Jötuns, who endeavor to regain their ancient dominion. The conflict between Good and Evil has grown up with the World-life itself, and ends only in its destruction.

CHAPTER IX.

OF YGGDRASILL.

All living Nature is represented in the figure of the Ash Yggdrasill. The name is uncertain, but seems to be best explained by the term Yggs, as Odin's horse, chariot, or seat.* The living world was regarded as moved and guided by the Divinity, which had its seat therein, as the Spirit in the body. The name in this sense fully coincides with the spirit of the Old-Norse poetry: and the myth of Yggdrasill appears to be throughout a poetic allegory.

The World-tree grows up from three roots. The one shoots from Hvergelmir, the primeval source of matter in the Abyss; the second from Jötunheim, from the depths of the raw material forces of the world; the third from the celestial abodes of the Æsir, from the source of the spiritual World-life. The figure agrees with the theory of creation. In the top of the tree sits an eagle, doubtless the symbol of Spirit or Life; at its root in Hvergelmir lies Niðhögg, the Dragon of Darkness and Death; but the squirrel Ratatösk* runs up and down the trunk bearing malignant words between the Eagle and the Dragon; contending powers are active in Nature, and deceitful wickedness creeps in with its slanderous tongue through human life and disturbs its peace. "The Ash Yggdrasill," says an ancient poem, "endures more hardships than any one knows; the harts bite off its branches, its trunk decays, and Niðhögg gnaws at its root." The living creation consumes Nature's nourishing power; its productions dry up and die when their time has come; and what is worst of all, the element of evil gnaws continually at its deepest root. But the trunk of the tree is sprinkled over with the sacred, purifying waters of the celestial fountain, and Yggdrasill, with all its sufferings, stands forever green; the life of Nature is sustained and renewed by the providence of the Celestial Powers. Here again the main idea is the grand struggle which goes through the World-life, the struggle between Spirit and Matter, between Good and Evil, between Life and Death.

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* Yggr, one of Odin's names, signifies: the Terrible, Fear-inspiring, or also the Meditative; drasill or drösull, from draga, to draw, to bear.

F. Magnusen also has ý, cogn. with úr, moisture, rain; whence yg, ygg, was formed, hence it would signify the bearer of rain, or the bearer of Odin.

Beneath that root of the World-tree, which shoots up from the Jötun's home, there is a well, called, after its watcher, Mímir's Well, in which Wisdom, or rather Knowledge, lies concealed. The name

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* Probably from rata, to find the way, to come, to go; and taska (*Germ.* Tasche), a pocket or pouch. The Running Pouch may express the capacity of a tale-bearer or mischief-maker.

Mimir signifies The Knowing.* The Jötuns, being older than the Æsir, looked deeper than they into the darkness of the Past. They had seen the beginning of the Æsir and of the World; they foresaw in like manner their downfall. Concerning both these events the Æsir had to go to them for knowledge—an idea which is expressed in many places in the old mythic lays, but nowhere more clearly than in the Völuspá, where a Vala or prophetess, fostered among the Jötuns, is represented as rising up from the deep, and unveiling the Past and the Future to gods and men. It is the Wisdom of that deep, therefore, that Mímir keeps in his Well. Odin himself, the God of Heaven, must obtain it from him; he goes thither in the night season, when the sun, the Eye of Heaven, has gone down behind the borders of the earth, unto the Jötun World. Then Odin penetrates the secrets of the Deep, and his eye is pledged for the drink he receives from the Well of Knowledge. But in the glory of morning dawn, when the sun rises again from the Jötuns' World, the Watcher of the Well of Knowledge drinks from his golden horn the clear mead which flows over Odin's pledge. Heaven and this lower World impart their wisdom to each other mutually.†

The proper contrast to the fountain Hvergelmir in the lowest depths of the abyss, is the Urðarfount in Heaven, with whose sacred waters the Tree of the World is sustained. It is guarded by three maidens, three superior beings, whose names are Urður, Verðandi, and Skuld—the *Past*, the *Present*, and the *Future*[*]—and takes its name from the first and highest of them. These beings are called *Nornir.*[†] They are the Goddesses of Time and Fate; the former is distinctly expressed by their separate names; in the latter character no doubt their general name was given them. As Goddesses of Time they are sustainers of Yggdrasill. Time and earthly life are considered inseparable, therefore the Norns are also the Directors of Life and the Dispensers of Fate. For mankind they are the Goddesses of Birth, and Skuld, the youngest, as Valkyrja, is also a Goddess of Death. Their messengers attend man through life; they are said to spin his Thread of Fate at his birth, and

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* Evidently the same word as the *A.-S.* meomer, skillful, knowing; mimerian, to keep in memory; and cogn. with the *Lat.* memor. The special signification of the word was doubtless "Skilled in the Past."

† From an indistinct and sensual understanding of this myth, Odin was usually represented as one-eyed.

[*] Urðr and Verðandi, substantive forms of verða (*Germ.* werden; *A.-S.* weorðan), to become. The former corresponds to the *part. past*, vorðinn, or orðinn, completed; the latter to the *part. pres.* verðandi, becoming, happening. Skuld, the coming, is from skuld, the *part. past* of skulu (*Swed.* skola; *A.-S.* sculon); *pres.* skal (*Swed.* skall; *Dan.* skal; *A.-S.* sceal; *Engl.* shall); *past.* skyldi (*Swed.* skulle; *Dan.* skulde; *A.-S.* sceolde; *Engl.* should). The name signifies also, duty, obligation (*Dan.* Skyld), and thus denotes her character as Goddess of Death. The *A.-S.* Wyrd, was, like Urðr, a Fate or Destiny, from which is derived the later English term weird, as "The Weird Sisters."

[†] Some trace a connection between the word Norn and snera or nera, an older form of snua, to twist, to twine; and thus find it to express the agency of the Nornir, as the beings who spin the thread of Fate.

to mark out with it the limits of his sphere of action in life.

> "They laid down laws,
> They selected life
> For the children of Time—
> The destinies of men,"

says the Völuspá of the three great Norns. Their decrees (lög) are inviolable Destiny (orlög), their dispensations (sköp) inevitable Necessity (nauðr).

The relation between these beings and the Æsir is but obscurely stated in the Asa Mythology. It appears to represent the Norns as being fostered among the Jötuns and independent of the Æsir. The judgment seat of the Æsir is near the Urðar fount; hence their decrees are passed under the supervision of the Norns. The Æsir themselves must bow before the laws of the Norns; they were also limited by Time,—they were born and were to die. However, the relation between Time and Eternity, Divinity and Fate, was to the Asa worshipers, as to many other heathen people, only a dark riddle which they, indeed, dared to ponder upon, but could not solve. It formed a germ of self-contradiction in their Mythology which might well call far deeper thinkers to look beyond the perishable Æsir, and betrays, though indistinctly, the traces of a purer religion which the people had inherited.

The Myth of Yggdrasill, taken as a whole, is one of the sublimest in the Asa Mythology. It evinces clear and profound thought, which has seen through the inmost essence of the Æsir faith, and compressed its whole doctrine into one grand image.

CHAPTER X.

OF THE MYTHIC DIVISIONS OF THE WORLD.

Heimr in the Old-Norse signifies home, and in a wider sense, the World as the home or abode of all living beings. The name has thus a twofold significance: one comprehensive, embracing all things; and one more limited, namely, the abode of a greater or smaller circle of beings, as the Gods, Mankind, the Jötuns, &c. In its broader sense the name was probably not used in heathendom, but frequently in the more limited one. The conception of a Universe was lost among the Asa worshipers in the representation of many isolated worlds, each one of which was considered to be the special abode of a distinct class of beings.

From many passages in the old Eddaic poems, it is clear that the Asa Mythology admitted of nine such worlds, but how they were designated or how situated in reference to each other is less certain, and the notions of the interpreters are much divided in the matter. The following order appears to be the most in accordance with the ancient sources:

1. Muspellheimr, the highest *Fire-World*, the realm of Surtur. In its highest regions it appears that Gimli was thought to be situated.

2. Goðheimr, the *World of the Gods*, or Ásgarðr, the *Æsir's Ward*, the proper Heaven, which appa-

rently forms a vault above the Earth. In the midst of this world is Iðavöllr*—the *Field of Activity*, the Assembling-place of the Æsir. Here is Odin's lofty throne Hliðskjálf,† which towers above the highest arch of the Heavens.

3. Vanaheimr, the *World of the Vanir;* the air, or the space between Heaven and Earth filled only with clouds.

4. Mannheimr, or Miðgarðr, the *World of Mankind*, the round disc of the Earth, surrounded by the great World-Ocean. The name Miðgarðr appears to have been often used as more comprehensive, as including the arch of Heaven, or at least its lower border, which was actually believed to form a hedge or defense against the Jötuns.

5. Álfheimr, the *World of the Light-Elves*—the fertile surface of the Earth and the next adjoining region of the atmosphere.

6. Svartálfaheimr, the *World of the Dark-Elves* or Dwarves—the interior of the Earth-disc.

7. Jötunheimr, the *World of the Jötuns*—the mountain wastes around the Earth's disc. This world was believed to slope downward, especially towards the north. It was occasionally placed within the World-Ocean, but mostly, and especially

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* From iðja, to work; Ið, activity; völlr, a field.

† Evidently derived from hlið (*A.-S.* hlið), a gate or port; cogn. with *Engl.* lid. In the O. Edda (Atlakviða 14,), liðskjalfar seems to mean *towers*. Grimm thinks the word may mean a turret-window, or the seat at a portal or window, and that skjálf thus corresponds to the *A.-S.* scylfe; *Engl.* shelf, in the sense of *bench*. Hliðskjálf was therefore supposed to be a portal or large window in Heaven, with its adjoining seat (*Deut. Mythol. p.* 124).

at first, outside of it as a border inclosing it.* It was thus believed to be separated from Mannheim by the ocean, as it was from Goðheim by a stream called Ifing,† which was never frozen over.

8. Helheimr, the *World of the Dead*, the lower World, the abode for the bodies of the Dead (*Halir*). Thither the way from the upper Worlds (Helvegr) led down by the North through Jötunheim over the stream Gjöll—the *Sounding* or *Shining* (Northern Lights?); the bridge over it, Gjallarbrú, was roofed with shining gold.

9. Niflheimr, the *Mist-World.* The first and last of these were primeval worlds, which were thought to be situated without the proper *mundane* World-system, to which the Æsir belonged.

We may remark, however, that the representations of these different worlds and their mutual relations, were very obscure and variable, even in heathen times. We could expect no other of a people but little enlightened, especially at a time when the knowledge of Nature was so very limited. In later times the confusion was increased when the Learned began to look for these Worlds upon the Earth, and to rack their brains in finding out proper regions to refer them to.‡

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* Compare the L. Edda: Gylfaginning 51, with the O. Edda: Hymiskviða.

† The word if or ef, ordinarily signifies doubt, but the original meaning appears to have been fluctuation, unrest.

‡ Magnusen's ideas of these worlds are set forth in his "Eddalære," page 179, et seq.; Petersen's, in "Danmarks Historie" III. pp. 122–124. The above system corresponds with the latter.

CHAPTER XI.

OF THE GODS.

The explanation of the Gods of the Asa Faith and of the purely mythological legends, is one of the most difficult tasks in the interpretation of its dogmas, and here more than anywhere, it is necessary to guard against seeking a well-finished allegory. It is true the gods are mainly a conception of the powers of Nature under certain personalities; but as a power of Nature could not be conceived of except in a personification, the latter, in its most sensual form, often became the Essential. All the gods of the Asa mythology are clothed in human form, and represented as thinking, acting, and even suffering, as men; but they are idealized in both physical and mental power, and thought to be less limited by Time and Space than earthly men;—and under this human form, and in a measure, human activity, the agency of Nature was very often wholly forgotten by the Skalds in their Mythological legends. They adhered, it is true, to the important distinctive attributes in the personality of each Divinity, but they introduced many extravagances of the imagination into their stories, merely to make them the more attractive. But this was, indeed, more frequently the case with the more diffuse legends, which we cannot dwell upon in this brief exposition of the Asa Mythology.

There are different grades in the ranks of the Asa-Gods, as we find by looking over the series attentively, that all are not in the same degree essential to build up the religious system as a whole, nor to complete its internal connection. Some form, as it were, indispensable main-springs to all the affairs of the World, while others only step forth at some one point thereof, and then more as an auxiliary power which has been brought out and personified by investigation, for the sake of completing a train of ideas, than as an independent power which of itself created its own personality. To the former class belong Odin, Friga, Thor, Njörð, Frey, Freyja, Baldur, Loki, and perhaps also Heimdall and Ægir; to the latter, Tyr, Höður, Vali, Viðarr, and all the remaining host of celestial beings, many of whom it is evident came into existence only to illustrate certain attributes of the more prominent gods, or their influence in certain directions, or else to form a connecting link in some mythological legend of importance. The latter class of gods, when the allegory is not complete, often presents the greatest difficulties to the interpreter.

The Gods have various terms in the Asa Mythology:—1. Goð (*sing.* Goð), the *Gods*—a name of uncertain origin. 2. Æsir (*sing.* Ás; *fem.* Ásynia), beings of a peculiar character and significance; the term is often limited to the highest class of celestial beings. 3. Tívar (*sing.* Tívor, Tívr, Týr), *Glorious*

Beings (tír signifying glory, honor); another form of the same name, more rarely occurring, is *Díar*, from which is derived Dísir (*sing.* Dís),[*] *Goddesses.* 4. Vear (*sing.* Veorr), *Holy Beings;* from ve,[†] holiness. 5. Regin, *Ruling Powers*, *Deliberating Deities.* 6. Bönd (*plur.* of band, a band), the *United*, the *Co-working.* 7. Höpt (*plur.* of hapt, binding, restraining), the *Moderators.* Of these the three first-mentioned terms are of most general occurrence. All these names for the gods generally denote, so far as their derivation is known, the attributes which were ascribed to them. The last two are remarkable because they express the idea of the intimate co-working of the gods in the government of the world.

The significance of Odin as the Soul of the World and the God of Heaven, has been already alluded to. He is named All-father—Alfaðir, Alföðr,—as the being from whom the Life of Nature and the Powers revealing themselves through it, the Gods, were thought to come forth. He is called the Father of Generations—Aldafaðir—with especial reference to mankind as his creation. Lastly, he is called Valfaðir as the God of War, in which character he was the Father of the Slain, even as the latter were his elected (*valr*), his Chosen Sons (*óskasynir*). It was natural for a nation whose greatest and most glorious avocation was War, to look upon the Supreme God of the World as preëminently the God of War, and it is certain that this was the character especially attributed to Odin, at least by the multitude. The War God therefore is denoted by a greater part of the various names which are attributed to him (in the Grimnismál there are no less than fifty-two);* although it is true that the doctrine that Odin "never called himself by the same name during his wanderings among the people," more nearly expresses the World-Spirit as a Being who, by an infinite variety of modes, reveals himself in Nature. The description of Valhalla,† as well as of the pastimes of the Einherjar—the *Chosen Heroes*, is in accordance with the attributes of the War-God. Odin's two Wolves—Geri, the *Greedy;* Freki, the *Rapacious*—distinguish him in the same capacity. His Ravens, however—Huginn, the *Thinking;* Muninn, the *Remembering*—which he sends out over the world, remind us at the same time, of the highest faculties of the human soul, as gifts of the Great Soul of the World. Vingólf‡—

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[*] Tívar occurs often in the O. Edda: Vafþrúdnm. 40, 42; Grimnism. 5; Hamarsheimt, 14, &c.; often also the compounds Valtívar, Chosen or Glorious Gods; Sigtívar, Victorious Gods. Díar occurs in no genuine Eddaic poem, for the so-called Hrafngaldr Óðins where it is found, is doubtless a production of later times.

[†] The word ve was used to express a particular god, and the *plur.* ve also denoted sacred places. It is cogn. with the *Old Germ.* wih, a grove; *Old Saxon* wih, a temple; *Goth.* veihan; *Germ.* weihen, to consecrate.

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* The O. Edda; Grimn., 46–54; the L. Edda; Gylf., 3.

† Valhöll, from valr; *Old Germ.* wal; *A.-S.* wæl: the Slain in Battle, cognate with velja, to choose, elect; val, *Dan.* Valg; *Germ.* Wahl; choice, election; and höll (*Goth.* hallus; *Old Germ.* halla; *A.-S.* heal, hæl; *Engl.* hall); may mean either the Hall of the Chosen, or the Hall of the Slain.

‡ Vingólf, the Abode of Friends; vinr (*Dan.* Ven), a friend; cogn. with unna, to love, to favor; *A.-S.* unnan, to give, bestow; gólf (*Dan.* Gulv), a floor, also a hall.

the *Friendly Hall*—the Assembling-place of the Goddesses, stands beside Valhalla as the abode of Odin's Chosen Sons.

Odin's marriage relations, so far as we know of them, have reference to the reciprocal relations of Heaven and Earth. Jörð, the *Earth*,[*] is usually called Odin's wife, but sometimes also his daughter. The Earth is often mentioned as a divine Being, as Fjörgyn, the *Life-giving*,[†] or as Hlóðyn, the *Warming;* and as the Fruit-bearing it is specially personified in Friga.[‡] Her abode, Fensalir, the *Marshy Halls*,[§] denotes the deep, moist earth. In the representation of the Æsir generally as the children of Odin by the Earth or Friga, the idea is evidently expressed that the Powers operating in the natural World, came into being through the influence of Heaven upon the Earth, of Spirit over Matter.

Thor is the God of Thunder. The name expresses this attribute, as þór is a contraction of þónr or þónar,[‖] and thus signifies Thunder, or the Thundering. That he should, from this attribute, be regarded as the strongest of the Gods, was natural. His abode was therefore called the Home or Realm of Strength (Þrúðheimr, Þrúðvángr, from Þrúðr, an older form of Þróttr, strength, endurance); his hall, however, from the lightnings which rend the dark clouds, was called the Purifier of Storms (Bilskirnir, from *bilr*, storm, and *skira*, to purify, make clear). By his driving through the clouds with bleating goats attached to his car, is expressed the varied sounds of thunder. His surnames and his whole fire-like being denote the attributes of the thunder storm, its terrifying, but beneficial influences in nature. He is represented as the Watcher in Miðgarð against the Jötuns, whose sworn enemy he is. When Thor is absent in the East fighting with the Trolls, Miðgarð is sorely beset by the Jötuns; but when he comes home and swings his huge hammer Mjölnir,* they all take flight in terror. Thunder belongs to Summer, which is the enemy of Winter, and puts the cold to flight. Thor's combat with the Jötuns was a favorite theme of the Skalds of Antiquity, and many of the mythological legends of those times had their real sources in certain local circumstances which it is difficult to trace out. Thor's personality is always well maintained in these legends; he steps forth hot-tempered and violent, but also frank and good-natured in the extreme. His attendants—the light-footed boy Thjálfi (the Diligent), and the girl Röskva (the Quick)*, are expressive of the speed with which the thunder-storm flies over. His wife Síf with golden hair, denotes the autumnal Earth, with its fields of yellow ripening corn and fading grass. In Norway, even to this day, the corn is thought to be ripened by the autumnal sheet-lightnings, which are without thunder, and hence they are called Kornmo.†

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[*] Jörð; *Mæso-Goth.* airþa; *Old Germ.* ërda; *A.-S.* eorðe; *Engl.* the Earth.

[†] From fjör, life.

[‡] Grimm supposes this word to be derived from fría; *Goth.* frijon; *Old High Germ.* fríon; to love; cognate with the *Old Saxon* frí; *A. S.* freo; woman. He traces the grammatical affinities of the words Friga, Freyja, Freyr, through all the Old-Germanic languages, and shows that the original signification is that of joyful, glad, imparting gladness, beauteous, lovely (*Deut. Mythol.*, p. 17, etc.).

[§] From fen; *A.-S.* fen; *Engl.* fen; which in the Norse may also signify the watery deep; and salr; *Old Germ.* sal; *Old Sax.* seli; *A.-S.* sele; *Dan.* Sal; *Germ.* Saal; a Saloon, Hall, Mansion.

[‖] Corresponding Germanic names; *A.-S.* þur, þunor, þunder; *Old S.* þunar; *Goth.* þunrs.

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* Mjölnir, probably from mölva, to break in pieces; melja, to crush, to pound, or mala, to grind; all cogn. with the *Germ.* mahlen, to grind, and Mühle, a mill; and prob. with *Lat.* malleus, a mallet.

The Vanir, in the Asa Mythology, form a peculiar class of beings, originally the enemies of the Æsir, but afterward connected with them on terms of the closest intimacy. If we turn our attention to the gods Njörð and Frey, who are reckoned with that race, it will be evident that they properly belong to the Air, and denote its beneficial influence over the life of Nature. The name Vanir, the *Vacant*, *Incorporeal* (from *vanr*, empty, void), denotes their aërial nature. In what manner the contest between the Æsir and the Vanir, which was laid aside in the World's first existence, and concluded by a treaty in which the Æsir gave Hænir as a hostage against Njörð, should be most correctly interpreted, it is not so easy to decide. Some believe the myth to express the idea that the light of Heaven had to break through thick clouds which originally enveloped the Earth in order to call forth Fruitfulness, which thus was thought to be an effect of the united powers of Heaven and the Atmosphere.* Others have referred this contest between the Æsir and the Vanir to a strife between two religious parties, the Fire-worshipers and Water-worshipers, which was ended by a blending of both religions; the Water-deities or Vanir, being received among the Fire-deities or Æsir, and worshiped side by side with them.† It might be easier perhaps to imagine a contest between a wandering, warlike nation and a peaceful, agricultural, and sea-faring one, which ended in the union of the two. The reason why the Vanir were frequently represented as wise—*visir Vanir, vis regin*—is unknown.

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* þjálfi, from þjálf, assiduous labor; Röskva, from röskr, quick, lively, active; cogn. with *Swed.* and *Dan.* rask; *Germ.* rasch; *Engl.* rash.

† Or Kornmoð, literally, the Corn-ripener.

Njörð‡ is the God of the Air and the mild Wind, and as such, the Patron of Sea-faring and Fishing. His dwelling is by the sea in Nóatún—the *Ship-meadow*.§ His wife is the Jötun-daughter Skaði‖—the *Harm-bringing*—the Goddess of Winter-storms and rough mountain winds. Her favorite abode is Thrymheim*—the *Home of Storms*—the lofty, storm-raging, snow-covered mountain regions where only the hunter on his snow-shoes finds nourishment. The compromise between them, to dwell nine nights in Thrymheim and three nights in Nóatún, refers to the high northern latitudes where rough weather and wintry storms prevail during the greater part of the year.

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* Magnusen; Transl. O. Edda. I., p. 114, &c.

† Geijer; Svea-Rikes Häfder, I., pp. 354–366.

‡ Many derivations of the Word Njörðr are given. Magnusen's is from næra (*Germ.* nähren) to nourish; our author thinks it cognate with njörva, to bind together, as Njörð was in a manner the bond of union between the Æsir and the Vanir. According to Grimm it may be from norðr, north; the corresponding *Goth.* form, Naírþus; and in other Germanic dialects, Nírdu, Nird, or Nerd; and the name and divinity identic with the *Nerthus* of Tacitus, which he deems the right reading of *Hertha.* (*Deut. Mythol.* pp. 197, 229.)

§ From Nór, a ship, and tún, a meadow, a cultivated or inclosed field—formerly, a town, as Sigtún, the Victor's (Odin's) Town, in Sweden.

‖ From skaða (*Dan.* skade; *Germ.* schaden), to injure: cogn. with *A.-S.* scaðian, *Engl.* scath.

Njörð's children, Frey and Freyja, are the Deities of Fruitfulness; the former with regard to the Earth, the latter, to Mankind. Their names in the Old-Norse, as well as in many of the ancient Germanic languages, signify Lord or Master, and Lady or Mistress; but it is uncertain whether this be the original meaning, or whether it was not rather derived from the great veneration in which these divinities were held at an early age among the Germanic races. There is every reason to suppose a direct affinity between these two names and frór, peaceable, gentle; fró, peace, repose; as well as friófr, fruitful; frióf, frió, seed; in the former case they would denote the gentleness which was attributed to these beings, in the latter they would designate them as the Bestowers of Fruitfulness.†

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* þrymr, uproar; þrymia, to storm.

† The Gothic name corresponding to Freyr in the sense of Lord and Master, is Fráuja; *Old High Germ.* Fró; *A.-S.* Fréa. Corresponding to Freyja in the sense of Lady or Mistress is the *Old High Germ.* Frouwa, Frowa; *A.-S.* Freo; *Goth.* Fráujo; and modern *Dan.* Frue; *Swed.* Fru; *Germ.* Frau. Comp. *Deut. Mythol.* pp. 190–200, 276–277.

Frey drives with his golden-bristled Boar—the symbol of the productiveness of the fields;—or he sails in his ærial ship Skiðblaðnir,* over the light clouds. He dwells in Álfheim, and rules over the Light-Elves (Ljósálfar)—the bland spirits which hover about the fruitful earth. His love for the Jötun maiden Gerða†—the *Embracing*, *Surrounding*—expresses the longing of Fruitfulness to impart its blessings to the wintry Earth.‡ To gain the object of his longing he gives away his good sword, and therefore he alone is weaponless among the warlike Æsir,—the culture of the earth is an employment of peace; it thrives only where weapons are at rest.

Freyja's abode is the People's Fields or Habitations (Fólkvángar);§ in her hall there is room for many seats.‖ The Goddess of Love journeys among mankind and embraces their numerous hosts with her divine power. She drives with cats—a symbol of sly fondling and sensual enjoyment. Her husband's name, Óður, signifies Sense, Understanding, but also wild desire. The various names bestowed upon her when she travels among the people, denote the various modes by which Love reveals itself in human life. The other Goddesses named in the Asa Mythology as Patronesses of Love and Marriage—Sjöfn, Lofn, and Vár—were all regarded as messengers and attendants of Freyja.

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* Skið, a thin shingle, or a sheath; cognate with the *Dan.* Skede; *Germ.* Scheide; *A.-S.* sceað. Blað; *Dan.* Blad; *Germ.* Blatt; cogn. with *Engl.* blade. The word denotes the property of the ship, that although it was so large as to hold all the Æsir yet it was so skillfully made, that when it was not wanted its leaf-like planks could be folded up like a cloth and the whole affair carried in the pocket (see L. Edda, Gylf. 43).

† Gerðr signifies a girth, inclosure, from girða, to gird, which is cognate with garðr (see Chap. 8, Miðgarðr). Both *gerd* and *gard* are common terminations of female names, as Hildigard, Thorgerd &c.

‡ Pct. Danm. Hist. III., p. 178.

§ Fólk; *A.-S.* folc; *Sw.*, *Dan.* and *Engl.* folk; *Germ.* Volk. Vángr, *pl.* vángar, an inclosure, field; cogn. with *Germ.* Wohnung, a habitation.

‖ Sessrýmnir, from sess (*Dan.* Sæde; *Germ.* Sitze), a seat, and rýma, to make room—literally, the Seat-roomy.

The Æsir Baldur, Höður, and Vali are the most intimately connected with each other, but their significance can be best understood in connection with the myth of Baldur's Death, under which they shall be mentioned.

Týr[*] is the God of warlike boldness, of Bravery; Bragi is, as the name itself implies, the God of Poetry.[†] They are both Sons of Odin, and are in reality only peculiar expressions of Odin's being. As the God of War he awakens wild courage, as the Sovereign of the Soul he is himself represented as the Inventor of Poetry.

Iduna, the *Efficacious*, perhaps originally signified Nature's vigorous Summer-life; to the Æsir she is the Goddess of Eternal Youth. Her connection with Bragi refers to the poet's mission of immortalizing great deeds.

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[*] Týr corresponds with *A.-S.* Tír, glory, dominion; the *Sanskr.* Djaus, *gen.* Divas; *Gr.* Ζεὺς, *gen.* Διὸς; *Mœso-Goth.* Tius, *gen.* Tivis; *Norse* Týr, *gen.* Týs; are cognate words signifying God. (*Deut. Mythol.*, pp. 175, 187.)

[†] Bragi corresponds with *A.-S.* Brego, a ruler, prince; and perhaps with *A.-S.* brægen, brain. In the *Norse*, bragr signifies poetry.

Saga is, as the name directly implies, the Goddess of History. Her dwelling is Sökkvabekk—(the sinking, the deep brook)—the stream of Time and of Events, where Odin (Spirit) visits her and is gladdened by her instructive discourse.

Heimdall is one of the Gods whose signification is very obscure. The name may perhaps be traced from heimr and dallr (in the sense of dæll, agreeable, pleasing), and may denote the pleasures of the world. The name of his abode Híminbjörg signifies Heaven's Mount or Heaven's Salvation. He was probably regarded as the Deity of the Rainbow, although the many special attributes and names bestowed upon him can hardly be explained by this character alone.

Not less obscure in Viðar's character. The name seems most easily explained with "The Winner of Victory" (being used in the sense of Vinnar, from vinna to overcome), and in this case refers to his victory in the last battle of the Gods. He may thus denote the regenerative power which was thought to lie in the Earth. Therefore was he a son of Odin and a Jötun woman—of Spirit and Matter; therefore was his dwelling-place Landviðí—the wide earth; therefore was he the silent, inefficient god during the existing state of the world. In its downfall he first steps forth in his strength, conquering the powers of Darkness and Desolation, and he afterward dwells in the rejuvenated world.

In the high northern latitudes Winter, although

Nature lies in a state of torpor, is a very important season for the activity of men, hence it is not wonderful that the heathen Northmen imagined one of the Æsir to preside over that season, and to favor human operations by furnishing good roads and facilities for traveling, and inventing means for passing easily over the ice and snow. This Divinity is Ullur, whose name signifies the Wool-like or White. His abode is Ýdalir—the Dale of cool Dampness.

Forseti signifies, according to the name, the *Foreseated*, the Presider. He presides over Justice, and is the God of Righteousness. His dwelling is Glitnir, the *Shining*.[*] He is the son of Baldur—of spotless Innocence. When Innocence disappeared from the earth, Righteousness was left behind to fill its place.

The name Valkyrja signifies the Chooser of the Slain.[†] The Valkyrjur served Odin, and were the Goddesses of Battle and of Death. They are beings who realize to the senses Odin's attributes as the God of War.

The being who is regarded as the God of the Sea is designated by three names: Ægir—the Terrible (ægia, to frighten); Hlér—the Shelterer (hlé, *A.-S.*

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[*] Glita, to shine; or glitra, cogn. with *A.-S.* glitenan, glitnian; *Engl.* glitter, glisten. Forseti was worshiped by the Frisians, and called Fosite, (*Deut. Myth*, *pp.* 210–212.)

[†] Valr, *Old. Germ.* wal; *A.-S.* wæl; the Slain in battle; whence the *Dan.* Valplads; *Germ.* Wahlplatz; a field of battle: kyrja from kjöra, kjósa; *A.-S.* curon, ceósan; *Old. Germ.* küren, to choose. In the *A.-S.* such Latin words as Alecto, Bellona, were rendered by Wælcyrige and Wælcyrie.

hleó, *Dan.* Læ, *Engl.* lee); and Gýmir—the Concealing (geyma, *A.-S.* gyman, *Dan.* gjemme, to conceal, to keep). They express the sea in its uproar, in its mildness, and as the covering of the Deep. The name of his wife, Rán—Robbery, or the Robbing (ræna, to plunder), denotes the sea as craving its sacrifice of human life and of treasures. Ægir and his family, it is certain, did not belong among the Æsir, yet they were regarded, like them, as mighty beings, whose friendship was sought by the Æsir themselves. The ancient legend that Ægir, when visited by the Æsir, illuminated his hall with shining gold (lýsigull), refers no doubt to the phosphorescent light of the sea (marelldr, sea fire, *Dan.* Morild).

The Northmen imagined twelve of the Æsir to be superior, and, as it were, to form a Council of Gods; but which they were is nowhere said with certainty. In the ancient poem of Grimnismál * there are twelve celestial abodes enumerated by way of preeminence, and in the Later Edda,† twelve names by which Odin was especially designated. This preference shown in the Mythology for the number twelve, has appeared to several interpreters to refer to the divisions of the year among the heathen Northmen, and their reckoning of the sun's course. According to their theory, each of the twelve Æsir was the director of his respective month; the twelve names of Odin were names of the months; and the twelve celestial abodes denoted the twelve signs of the zodiac, which the sun passes through annually.* Magnusen has gone still farther, and referred the fifty-two names of Odin which are enumerated in the Grimnismál, to the fifty-two weeks of the year, the seventy-three names of Dwarves which occur in the Völuspá, to another division of the year into seventy-three Fifths, or sections of five days each, and finally, the thirteen names of the Valkyrjur in the Grimnismál, to the thirteen lunar changes of the solar year. On this he has built a complete heathen Calendar, based upon the solar year.† It is tolerably certain that the heathen Northmen divided the year into twelve months, and it is most likely that the number twelve in the Æsir

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* The O. Edda: Grimn. 5-17.

† The L. Edda: Gylf. 3.

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* [The following is the order of the twelve celestial abodes in the Grimnismál, arranged as "Solar Houses" corresponding to the signs of the zodiac, by F. Magnusen, in his Eddalære, Vol. III., p. 244:

1. Ýdalir,	the abode of	Ullr	Sagittarius	Nov.
2. Álfheimr,	"	Freyr	Capricornus	Dec.
3. Valaskjálf,	"	Vali	Aquarius	Jan.
4. Sökkvabekkr,	"	Saga	Pisces	Feb.
5. Glaðsheimr, or Valhöll,	"	Oðinn	Aries	Mar.
6. Þrymheimr,	"	Skaði	Taurus	April.
7. Breiðablik,	"	Baldr	Gemini	May.
8. Himinbjörg,	"	Heimdallr	Cancer	June.
9. Fólkvángar,	"	Freyja	Leo	July.
10. Glitnir,	"	Forseti	Virgo	Aug.
11. Nóatún,	"	Njörðr	Libra	Sept.
12. Landviði,	"	Viðarr	Scorpio	Oct. *Tr.*]

† See in Magnusen's Transl. of the O. Edda, Vol. I, the Interpretation of Grimnismál; and his "Specimen Calendarii Gentilis" at the conclusion of the Arna-Magnæan edition of the O. Edda, Vol. III.

Mythology is in connection with this division; that they also made use of a division of time consisting of five days (*fimt*) is very probable; but that they should have understood how to compute the solar year correctly, and especially that they should have had distinct ideas of the signs of the zodiac, as the heathen Calendar set up by Magnusen supposes, is very doubtful.

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE DOWNFALL OF THE WORLD.

IMMEDIATELY following the Creation of the World the Asa doctrine establishes a time of peace among Gods and Men. But it vanished from Heaven when the Æsir allowed the Jötuns to creep into their midst, and even formed connections with them in order to satisfy their desires, or to employ their powers to their own advantage; thus they impaired their Godlike power, and gave their enemies the courage to begin the great battle which was to endure till the destruction of the World. From the Earth, also, the time of guiltless peace disappeared when men became acquainted with the Jötun-power of gold, and set their minds and their dependence upon it. Then the Gods were offended, Odin cast his spear over the people, and strife began upon the Earth. Such appears to be the meaning of the somewhat obscure expressions of the Völuspá on this subject. Thus excessive cupidity and lust were regarded as the cause of the degeneration of the Godlike powers and of the mutual dissensions among men.*

The Asa doctrine represents Loki as the author of Evil among both Gods and men. This being has evidently a physical and a moral significance, namely: *Fire*, and *Sin* or *Sinful desire*. The name Loki (the Enticer, *Dan.* Lokker; cognate with lokka, *Dan.* lokke, to allure, entice) refers to the latter meaning, though its affinity to logi, flame, is unmistakable. To the former meaning his other names Lódurr and Loptr refer, the one designating him in the character of the blazing and heating earthly fire, the other in that of the unsteady air.* Nothing was more natural than to conceive of the being who ruled over the sometimes enlivening and sometimes devouring Fire, as a mingled character, hovering between good and evil powers—between the Æsir and the Jötuns; and in this character is again expressed his significance in a moral point of view. He steps forth in the ancient mythologic legends as the wheedling seducer whose beautiful and animated exterior conceals a malignant soul, and whose smooth tongue is full of lies and slander.

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* The O. Edda: Völuspá, 25–28.

There is, moreover, a distinction made in the Later Edda between two beings of this name, viz.: Loki and Utgarða-Loki—the Loki of the Outer-ward or Jötunheim. The latter is represented as a genuine Jötun, hideous in his whole being. It would appear that in him was meant to be presented physical and moral Evil in all its naked loathsomeness, while in Loki, as he makes his appearance among the Æsir, it was intended to represent the same in the seductive and seemingly beautiful form under which it glides about through the world of mankind.

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* The name, it is true, comes most directly from lóka or lúka, to lock, to close, to conclude (*Dan.* lukke: *M.-Goth.* lukan; *A.-S.* lucan), and it is remarkable that we find an Evil Spirit mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon poems by the name of Grendel, which is the same word as grindel, a bolt, bar, or grating. Logi, flame, is cogn. with the *M.-Goth.* liuhan, to shine, and liuhath; *A.-S.* leoht; *Germ.* Licht; *Engl.* light; also *Dan.* Lue; *Germ.* Lohe; smothered flame. Lóðurr is from the older lóð, fire (*Germ.* lodern, to blaze). Loptr, the Aërial, from lopt; *M.-Goth.* luftus; *Germ.* and *Dan.* Luft; *A.-S.* lyft, the air; whence the *Engl.* loft, lofty, aloft.

With the Jötun-woman Angrboði—(the Anguish-boding),* Loki begets the three most bitter enemies of the Æsir, Miðgarðsorm, Fenrisúlf, and Hel.† The two former express the disturbing powers in the Sea and the interior of the Earth, which, though bound for a time by the power of the Æsir, will one day burst their chains and work together for the destruction of the world. Hel (Death) is the disturbing power in man's being, which, without satiety, calls his bodily part to her abode, a cold, dark world of shades, full of want and loathsomeness.

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* Angr; *A.-S.* Ange; vexation, grief, anguish; býð, bjóða; *A. S.* beodan; to invite, offer, command.

† Ormr, a serpent (*A.-S.* wyrm, wurm, worm). Fenrir or Fenris-ulfr, from fen, a morass, gulf; ulfr, *A.-S.* wulf, a wolf, hence, the Monster of the Abyss. Hel, *Death*, the Goddess of Death. Some suppose the primary signification of the word to have been intense cold, cogn. with the *Lat.* gelu. Grimm derives it from hilan, to conceal, in the sense of a subterranean cavity (*A.-S.* hol, a cavern, *Engl.* hole, being probably cognate). At any rate, all the Germanic nations when converted to Christianity applied this name to the place where the souls of the wicked were supposed to be punished; thus, *Mæso-Gothic* halja; *Old Germ.* hellia, hella; *Germ.* Hölle; *A.-S.* helle; *Engl.* hell; *Norse*, helviti (prop. the punishment of death); *Swed.* helvete; *Dan.* Helvede; &c.

Baldur's death is represented in the Asa Mythology as an important event in the existence of the Gods and the World. So long as Baldur was in the midst of the Æsir their dominion stood unmoved, but by his death they were made conscious of their declining power; in it they saw a type of their own destiny. The whole world was filled with grief; for it felt that from that time forth it was going down toward inevitable dissolution.

The Myth of Baldur's Death has been usually explained by the triumph of Winter's darkness over the bright Summer-time. Baldur the Good is thus the God of Summer, the blind Höður becomes wintry Darkness, and Vali (the son of Odin by Rind—the unfruitful Winter-earth) is Spring, who, in turn, slays Winter. Loki (fire) is the only being who loses nothing by the disappearance of summer; he is therefore thought to be the cause of Baldur's death, and to prevent his release from Hel.

There is a great deal, however, against this interpretation, and most of all, is the circumstance that Baldur remains with Hel until the dissolution of the World, while Summer annually returns. It may be, indeed, that Baldur had originally a physical signification, but the Myths concerning him, as well as those relating to Loki, were very early regarded from a moral point of view, and it is thus that they are represented in the Eddas.

The whole representation of Baldur's existence, and of his far-shining abode, Breiðablik,* where

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From breiðr, broad, wide; and blika (*A.-S.* blican), to shine.

nothing impure is found, has reference to the Deity of Innocence. The name Balldr signifies the Strong,* and denotes spiritual Power combined with spotless Innocence. The blind Höður, in this connection, denotes physical strength, with its blind earthly endeavors. The latter, led on by Sin (Loki), unwittingly slays Innocence, and with Innocence dies the desire of good and the active participation in it—Nanna † dies of a broken heart and is burned on the funeral pile of her husband Baldur. The murder is avenged by the hastily-aroused reflection—Höður is slain by Vali. But Innocence has vanished from the world to return no more, although all Nature mourns its loss. Only in the regenerated World shall it again prevail.

The Æsir succeeded in appeasing their thirst for vengeance upon Loki, and even got him imprisoned in the Abyss, as they had before imprisoned his progeny; but the seeds of destruction and death had already been sown broadcast in the world, and they grew up vigorously. Thenceforth the Æsir foresaw the impending dissolution of the world and of themselves, against which they might, indeed, contend, but were not able to avert.

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* Balldr, ballr, baldinn, brave, strong, bold; *Mœso-Goth.* balþs, bold; *A.-S.* Bealdor, Baldor (the bolder), a hero, a prince, from beald, báld, hóld; bold, courageous, honorable, are terms cognate to the name of the God. Grimm believes this a later meaning, and that the name may be traced to the *Lithuanian* baltas, which signifies both *white* and *good*.

† From neuna, to be inclined to, to like.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF THE STATE OF BEING AFTER DEATH.

The Asa doctrine positively asserts the Immortality of the Soul in connection with a state of Retribution beyond the grave; and it appears to have regarded man as originally created to Immortality, and the dissolution of the body in death to have its type in Baldur's death, and like it to be a work of Loki's malignity.

But although the belief in the immortality of the soul was firmly established, yet the ideas concerning the state of existence after death were dark and unsettled. The relation between Odin and Hel, between Godheim and Helheim, presented a difficulty which they strove to solve by various modes. In the Later Edda it is said that they who are slain in battle go to Odin, in Valhalla, but those who die of sickness or old age go to Hel, in Helheim.* According to this, in a strict sense, it should be the kind of death alone that decided the soul's future state; only those who fall by weapons ascend to the glad abodes of Heaven, while all who die of sickness wander away to the dark world of the

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* The L. Edda: Gylfaginning 20 and 34.

Abyss. But even in heathen times it was hardly thus understood, except, indeed, by individuals in whose eyes nothing was praiseworthy except warlike deeds. The Asa doctrine, taken as a comprehensive whole, presents a different view, which occurs in various places in the lays and legends of heathen times, and which may be regarded as really proper to the Asa-faith.

The spirit (önd) or soul (sál) of man was a gift of Odin; the body, blood, and external beauty were a gift of Lodurr or Loki; the former belonged to the Spirit World or Heaven, the latter to the Material World—to the Deep. They were joined together with the earthly life; at its close they were separated, and each returned to its original source. The soul, with the more refined bodily form in which it was thought to be enveloped, went to the home of the Gods, while the body, with the grosser material life which was conceived to be inseparable from it, went to the abodes of Hel to become the prey of Loki's daughter. Man's being was thus divided between Odin and Hel. Odin, who was also the God of War, was thought to claim his share chiefly from those who fell in battle; Hel from those who died of sickness. Death by arms came thus to be considered a happy lot by the zealous followers of the Asa-Faith, for it was a proof of Odin's favor. He who fell by arms was called by Odin to himself before Hel laid claim to her share of his being; he was Odin's chosen son, who, with longing, was awaited in Valhalla, that in the Einherjar ranks he might sustain the Æsir in their last battle. Therefore, the

Skald, in a song of praise to the fallen king Eirik Blood-axe, lets Odin say to Bragi, in answer to the question why he had bereaved Eirik the Victorious who was so brave: "Our lot is uncertain; the gray wolf gazes on the hosts of the Gods," *i. e.* we know not when the Fenris-wolf shall come, therefore we may need the help of heroes. In the same sense Eyvind Skaldaspillir, in his Hákonarmál, makes the Valkyrja say: "Now do the helping hosts of the Gods grow stronger, when they have, by their brave bands, brought Hákon to their home."

But because the dead who were slain by arms were thought to be called to the hosts of the Einherjar, it was not supposed that Hel was deprived of all share in their being; nor yet, on the other hand, that the soul of every one who died a natural death was shut out from Heaven, and forced to follow the body down into the abodes of Hel. That it was virtue, on the whole, and not bravery alone, which was to be rewarded in another life, and that it was wickedness and vice which were to be punished, is distinctly shown in the ancient heathen poem Völuspá, where it says that in Gimli shall the righteous hosts (dyggvar dróttir) enjoy gladness forever, while perjurers, murderers, and they who seduce men's wives, shall wade through thick venom-streams in Náströnd. Although the language is here used in reference to the state of things after Ragnarökkr, it may be assumed that they had similar ideas concerning the preceding middle state of the Dead.

It was certainly believed that the soul of the Virtuous, even though death by arms had not released it from the body and raised it up to the ranks of the real Einherjar, still found an abode in Heaven—in Valhalla, in Vingólf, or in Fólkvangar. The heathen Skald, Thjodolf of Hvin, makes King Vanlandi go to Odin, although Hel tortured him,* and the Asa worshiper, Egil Skallagrimsson, doubts not that Odin has received his drowned son in Godheim.† The souls of noble women were also believed to go to Heaven after death; there they found an abode with Freyja, and the spirits of maidens with Gefjon. When it is said that Freyja sometimes shares the slain with Odin, it is meant, perhaps, that the slain, who in life had loved wives, were united to them again with Freyja.

On the other hand it was as certainly believed that blasphemy and baseness might shut out even the bravest from Valhalla. Thus the Saga has the zealous Asa worshiper, Hákon Jarl, to say of the bold but wicked Hrapp who had seduced his benefactor's daughter and burned a temple: "The man who did this shall be banished from Valhalla and never come thither." ‡

The strict construction of the Asa doctrine appears, therefore, to be this, that although man was divided between Odin and Hel, yet each one's share of his being after death was greater or less, according to the life he had lived. The spirit of the Virtuous and the Brave had the power to bear up to Heaven with it after death the better part of its corporeal being, and Hel obtained only the dust. But he whose spirit by wickedness and base sensual lust was drawn away from Heaven, became in all his being the prey of Hel. His soul was not strong enough to mount freely up to the celestial abodes of the Gods, but was drawn down into the abyss by the dust with which it had ever been clogged. No doubt the representation of Hel as being half white and half pale-blue had its real origin in this thought—that to the Good, Death appeared as a bright Goddess of Deliverance, and to the Wicked, as a dark and punishing Deity.

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* Snorri: Ynlinga Saga, 16.

† Egils Saga, 80,

‡ Niáls Saga, 89.

When the Drowned were supposed to arrive at the halls of Rán, the Sea-goddess filled the place of Hel; Rán claimed the body as her prey, the spirit ascended to Heaven.

The belief that bondsmen after death should come to Thor, seems to express the thought that their spirits had not the power to mount up with freeborn heroes to the higher celestial abodes, but were compelled to linger midway, as it were, among the low, floating clouds, under the stern dominion of Thor;—a thought painful to the feelings of humanity, but wholly in accordance with the views of the age and the people.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF THE DESTRUCTION AND REGENERATION OF THE GODS AND THE WORLD.

THE disappearance of the Golden Age, Baldur's Death, and the confinement of Loki, are represented as events long passed away: the glance toward the Future meets at once with Ragnarökk*—the Twilight of the Gods.

The great antagonism which pervades the World-life shall be removed in a final struggle, in which the contending powers mutually destroy each other. This is a fundamental idea of the Asa faith. And that that great World-struggle was vividly impressed upon the spirit of the heathen Northmen, is attested by the strong colors in which the Vala, speaking in the Völuspá, paints it; and still more is it attested by the oft-repeated assertion, that every hero who falls on the field of battle is called by Odin to the ranks of the Einherjar, to fight with them in the decisive battle against the Powers of Darkness.

Ragnarökk is an outbreak of all the chaotic powers, a conflict between them and the established order of Creation. Fire, Water, Darkness and Death work together to destroy the World. The

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* Regin, Divine power, the Gods (Chap. 11), and rökkr, darkness, twilight.

Æsir and their enemies mutually slay each other. The flames of Surtur, the supreme Fire-God, complete the overthrow, and the last remnant of the consumed Earth sinks into the ocean.

But as the two primeval Worlds, Muspell and Niflheim, stand unshaken, neither is the terrestrial world eternally destroyed in Ragnarökk. When the great convulsion is finished, the Earth comes forth out of the ocean, regenerated and purified from Evil, as the abode of a new, a vigorous, and a happy race of men. With the renewed Earth appears a renovated race of Æsir. Viðarr and Vali, who survive the universal conflagration, join with their brothers Baldur and Höðurr, now set free from the dominion of Death, and in concord they take possession of the mansions of their common Father Odin. In Thor's stead step forth his sons Móði—the *Courage-Giver*, and Magni—the *Strength-Giver*,* who have inherited their father's Hammer, his all-subduing power. But a God, higher than all the Æsir, shall then reveal himself to rule over the World through all eternity. According to his judgments shall be the eternal reward and the eternal punishment of the immortal souls of the departed; the Good shall be raised up to the highest realm of light—to Gimli;† the Wicked shall follow the

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* Móði, from móðr (*Swed.* mod; *Dan.* Mod; *Germ.* Muth), courage; cogn. with *A.-S.* mód; *Engl.* mood. Magni, from magn, (*A.-S.* mægen) strength; magna, to give strength; cognate with *M.-Goth.* mahts; *Germ.* Macht; *A.-S.* máht; *Engl.* might; also with *Lat.* magnus.

† Cognate with gimr, gimsteinn, a gem, sparkling stone (*Alemannic* gimme; *A.-S.* gim, gymstán; *Lat.* gemma; *Engl.* gem), and

Dragon of Darkness, who with Death upon his wings flees away to the abyss, never more to arise from it.

But the doctrine of Regeneration and the Coming of the Supreme God to the great Judgment, was not so vividly present to the minds of the Asa-worshipers as was the doctrine of Ragnarökk. What might be beyond the great World-conflagration was to them a dark enigma, which few were bold enough to fathom. Perhaps in that highest God they had a dim conception of that Mighty One from whom the first spark of the World-life proceeded, who dwelt in the Fire-Heaven before the World and the Æsir came into being, and who was to scatter over them the fire of Devastation in Ragnarökk; but this presentiment was joined with a feeling of fear, and hence no man should dare to pronounce the name of the Great Judge of the Universe.*

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thus denoted "The Shining Abode." When Grimm assumes that Gimli is a dative form of gimill (which he takes to be the same as himill, an older form of himinn, heaven), because Gimli is used only in the dative (*Deut. Myth. p.* 783), he errs, as Gimli occurs twice in the nominative form (Gylf. 3 and 17).

* The author inclines to Finn Magnusen's opinion that the Highest God whose coming the Völuspá and Hyndluljóð announce, is Surtur; although most authorities reject it. (*See Grimm., Deut. Myth. pp.* 784–5; *Geijer: Svea-Rikes Häfder Vol. I. p.* 336.

CHAPTER XV.

GENERAL VIEW.

In conclusion, if we take a general view of the prominent features of the Asa doctrine, we have the following summary of the whole:

By the reciprocal action of Heat and Cold was the first unorganized but powerful World-mass produced, as a shapeless Jötun-form. From this mass, through a series of developments came forth higher Powers, which, by the power of Spirit, overcame the rude Giant-mass and out of it created Heaven and Earth, the actual World with its inhabitants, including mankind.

The Gods or Æsir are these ordaining powers of Nature, clothed in personality. They direct the world which they created; but beside them stand the mighty Goddesses of Fate, the great Norns, who uphold the World-Structure, the all-embracing Tree of the World.

The World-Life is a struggle between the good and light Gods on one side, and the offspring of chaotic matter, the Jötuns, Nature's disturbing powers, on the other. This struggle reaches also into man's being. The spirit went forth from the Gods, the body belongs to the Jötun-world; the two powers contend with each other for the dominion.

Should the Spirit gain the victory through virtue and bravery, man ascends to Heaven after death in order to fight in concert with the Gods against the Powers of Evil; but if the body triumphs, and links the spirit to itself by weakness and low desires, he then sinks down after death to the Jötun-world in the Abyss, and joins in with the Evil Powers in the combat against the Gods.

This struggle of the World-Life shall end in a final battle, in which the contending powers mutually destroy each other, and the World which the Gods created is involved in their destruction. But it shall come forth again more glorious and purified. An Eternal God, greater than all Æsir, shall arise as its ruler and the austere Judge of departed souls. Before His power shall Evil depart forever.

The whole is a struggle between Light and Darkness, Spirit and Matter, Virtue and Vice,—a struggle which shall end in the triumph of Good over Evil.

III.

INFLUENCE OF THE ASA-FAITH ON THE POPULAR LIFE AND CUSTOMS OF THE NORTHMEN.

CHAPTER XVI.

MINISTERS OF RELIGION.

The belief in Superior Beings who control the powers of Nature and the destiny of mankind, must always create in man an effort to make these beings propitious, and thus give rise to Divine Worship. The more humanlike the Gods have been conceived to be, the more sensual has their worship been; and it happened with the votaries of the Asa-faith as with so many other heathens, that sacrifices, gifts, vows, and ceremonies were regarded by the multitude to be fully as acceptable to the Gods as an upright life. These sacred performances were always more or less symbolical, as they were intended to express and harmonize with the presumed essence and attributes of the Deity invoked. They should, therefore, take place according to certain regulations, but the transgression of these rules, it was believed, might offend the Divinity, and thus produce an effect contrary to what was desired. But it was not always convenient for the common people to become thoroughly acquainted with these rules; the more exact knowledge of them became a concern of certain individuals better initiated in the religion, who were to guide the rest of the people, or rather, on their behalf to perform the sacred offices belonging to divine worship. Thus was established a class of servants of the Gods, or priests, who were thought to be nearer the Gods than other people, and in a manner to be mediators between the two.

But the influence of the priests varied according as the religion under which they ministered was more or less mysterious in its character.

In many of the heathen religions of antiquity there were but a few maxims generally known, while the greater part of them were most carefully veiled in mystery by the priests, who formed a peculiar order, distinctly separated from the rest of the people. In those religions the priests themselves figured as supernatural, mysterious beings, who were believed to hold the fate of other people in their hands; and the more this was the case, so much the greater was their influence over the rude, uncultivated masses. This kind of arrangement shows conclusively that the mythological doctrines were originally foreign to the people. It denotes in spiritual affairs what noble rank, or a strict feudal system indicates in temporal, namely, the subjugation of the aboriginal inhabitants of the country by in-wandering strangers.

There were other heathen religions in which no such preëstablished mysteriousness found a place; the order of priesthood was not distinctly set apart from the people, and the difference between priest and layman was in reality only the usual difference between the more and the less enlightened. This relative condition generally gives evidence of a spiritual independence united with temporal freedom among the whole people.

To the latter class of religions the Asa-faith unquestionably belonged. Every religion has its mysteries, which, in reality, could never become universally comprehensible; and this was in some degree the case with the one now under consideration. But these mysteries, it is certain, were not many, and therefore no great mysteriousness nor consequent distinct separation of the Asa priests was recognized. Kings and chieftains were at the same time priests of the Gods, and they universally performed the rites of divine worship in large popular assemblies, in the most public manner;—one proof among many that the Asa-faith was not, as many have supposed, introduced among the Northmen or forced upon them by a colony of foreign priests long after the people had separated from kindred races as an independent nation, but that in its germs it was carried along with the people themselves from former places of abode, and was afterward freely developed among them in their new home.

Snorri's account, in the first thirteen chapters of the Ynglinga Saga, of the arrival of Odin and his followers in the North, cannot be regarded otherwise than as a very erroneous interpretation of the old Eddaic myths, but which is in accordance with the views of his age. His account of the twelve Díar or Drótnar, who presided both at the sacrifices and at the judicial proceedings in the ancient Ásgard, and who afterward accompanied Odin to the North,* doubtless rests on the same foundation. The name *Díar* is evidently the same as Tívar, which, as above-mentioned,† was an appellation of the Gods. Then, even as Snorri's own account intimates, the twelve Díar were no other than the twelve Æsir who were specially worshiped. As a council of priests they exist only in Snorri's interpretation of the myths, and as this term, applied to the priests of the Æsir, does not occur either with the same author afterwards or in any other reliable poems or ancient Sagas of the Northmen, it becomes very doubtful whether it was used in this sense at all.

It is otherwise with the term Drótnar. The word dróttinn (*plur.* dróttnar) is much used in the Old-Norse in the sense of Lord or Master. In the earliest ages this name was peculiar to the highest rulers of the people, who at the same time presided at the courts of justice and were high-priests; but it gave way at an early period to konungr‡ (king), the title of honor which has been customary since—a change which some suppose to indicate that thenceforth the temporal dignity became of most importance with the rulers of the country, whereas the spiritual dignity had the ascendency before, or that the Warrior in them began to crowd out the Priest.* Thus the term Dróttnar appears at one time to have been applied to the priests of the Asa-faith, although it was only in so far as they were also the supreme rulers of the people; and it went out of use long before the time when history first sheds any clear light upon the heathen state of the Northmen, which was not, as is well known, until near its conclusion.

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* Snorri: Ynglinga Saga, 2, 6.

† Chap. 11.

‡ According to Snorri, twenty ages before Harald Hárfagri, or about the third century.

A third name conferred upon the priests is goðar or hofgoðar. The name goði can be derived from goð, God, and signifies a servant of God, a priest; hofgoði (hof, a temple) signifies priest or superintendent of a temple. The term goði was universal in Iceland. That island was divided into four Fjórðungar or fourths; in each Fjórðung there were originally three Thíngsóknar or judicial districts, and in each of these again, three chief temples (höfuð-hof). He who presided over such a temple was called Goði, and was at the same time chieftain and judge in the district,† and in the former character he was as influential as in that of priest. His official dignity, with the influence depending on it, was called in Iceland Goðorð,‡ and was entered upon with a solemn ceremonial in which the future Goði slaughtered a ram and dipped his hands in its blood (at rjóða sik i goða blóði, to sprinkle himself with good blood).* It remained as a temporal dignity, after the introduction of Christianity upon the island, until it was subjected to the kings of Norway. That the office and the name, like most of the religious and judicial institutions of Iceland, were transported thither from Norway, cannot be doubted, although the name Goði is very rarely mentioned in the Sagas as being in use in the latter country. One of the original settlers of Iceland, Thorhad the Old, had been hofgoði in the temple of Mæri in Throndheim;† but in general, when those who conducted the sacred rites of heathendom in Norway are mentioned, it is only said of them that they "attended to the temples" (varðveittu hof);‡ that they "counseled the most for the sacrifices" (réðu mest fyrir blótum);§ that they "supported the sacrifices" (héldu upp blótum);‖ without any name of dignity being given them as priests. This was, no doubt, because in Norway the Hersir (a baron or ruler of a herað or district) was always a Goði at the same time, but was universally designated by the first-named title, as the most distinguished. But in Iceland the name hersir was not used, wherefore goði took its place, denoting the ruler of a herað, both in his priestly and temporal calling. As the dignity of Hersir was properly hereditary in Norway, so was the Goðorð in Iceland to be regarded as the possession of certain families.

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* Geijer: Svea-Rikes Häfder. Vol. I., 495.

† Landnámabók IV., 7 (Íslendinga Sögur, Vol. I., 1843).

‡ Literally: God-word—orð, word, authority.

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* Ljósvetninga saga (Ísl. S., Vol. II., 1830).

† Landnb. IV., 6.

‡ Ib. V. 8; Eyrb. s, 3.

§ Snorri: Saga Hákonar Góða., 19.

‖ Snor.: S. Olafs Tryggvasonar, 75.

Although the barons in Norway were thus, as Goði, the actual priests of the Asa-faith, there were also other secular rulers who conducted the public worship of the Gods. Kings or Jarls often directed the great sacrificial festivals which were attended by all the inhabitants of greater or smaller portions of the country, and they had the chief seats at the sacrificial banquets connected with them.* It was believed that the zeal of the kings in the worship of the Gods brought prosperity to the people, while negligence in this respect on their part brought ruin upon the whole country, caused unpropitious seasons and famine. For a neglect of this kind king Olaf Trételgia of Vermaland had to atone with his life;† while on the other hand, to Hákon Jarl's zeal in the worship of the Æsir was attributed the fruitfulness which, after many years of scarcity, returned to Norway when he became the ruler of the country.‡ Moreover, every one could worship at his home the Deities which he adored the most therefore it was not unusual for the rich landsman to have near his house a temple in which he performed the priestly rites for himself.§

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* Friðþjófs S., 9; Snor.: Sag. Hák. Góða, 16, 18.

† Snor.: Yngl. S., 47.

‡ Ib.: Sag. Ol. Tryggv., 16.

§ Olaf Tryggv. S. in Fornmanna Sögur, 145, 201; Droplauga sonar S. 26.

Women also sometimes conducted the sacrifices and performed other sacred rites belonging to the Asa worship,* and we even find that in Iceland they sometimes presided at the temples. Such a priestess was called Gyðia or Hofgyðia.

The Goðar, or priests, had charge of the continuation and propagation of the religious doctrines, which in those times took place by oral delivery from generation to generation. It is probable that they delivered the religious tenets publicly at the solemn festivals, and most generally in poetry. The name Thulr, a speaker,† which occurs in many places in the poems of the Older Edda, was the appellation of such a teacher, who during his discourse was accustomed to sit upon a seat of distinction (þularstóll). The religious tenets themselves are often called, in the ancient poems, rúnar or stafir. The former denotes originally *speech*, the latter, *written characters;* which latter signification the word rúnar also obtained afterwards. In ancient times, however, both terms appear to have been used synonymously of the doctrines which were orally delivered and retained in the memory. Many of the mythologic poems of the Older Edda are evidently didactic poems which were delivered before the assembled multitude at the sacrificial festivals, as well as in the instruction of the intended ministers of religion. The continual employment in the Skaldic minstrelsy of the myths of the Asa mythology to form its poetic figures, proves that a knowledge of its doctrines was diffused among the people; and therefore these embellishments, borrowed from the religious doctrines, could not be preserved in poetry alone, but must have been intelligible to the common people for many centuries after the downfall of the religion from which they were borrowed.

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* Friðþ. S. 9; Kristni. S. 2.

† From þylia, to recite, speak extempore.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ÆSIR AS OBJECTS OF WORSHIP AMONG THE NORTHMEN.

All the Gods of the Asa-faith were certainly invoked and worshiped by the heathen Northmen, although only a few of them are so mentioned in the ancient historical accounts, that we may know clearly how their being was understood by the people, or in what character each one was especially worshiped.

Odin was specially worshiped as the God of War—as the Dispenser of Victory; therefore the first filled horn at the sacrificial festivals was consecrated to him for victory.* It was believed that he rejoiced in the battles of men, which brought heroes to him in Valhalla; and hence the blame of a hero's fall was often laid upon him by the slayer. Thus Dag Högnason says, in exculpating himself before his sister Sigrún, who curses him because he has slain her husband Helgi Hundingsbani:

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* Snor.: Sag. Hák. Góða, 16.

"Mad art thou, sister!
And distracted,
That on thy brother
Thou callest down curses.
Odin alone
All misery brings,
For he between kinsmen
The battle-runes bore."*

Before a battle began the combatants directed each other to Valhalla, and the hostile host was consigned to Odin by casting a spear over it; a performance which undoubtedly had its type in the myth of Odin, in which he is represented as awakening the first battle in the world by throwing his spear among the people.† Before entering upon a march, or undertaking a warlike enterprise, they sought, by offerings, to gain the favor of Odin. Thus, it is related of Hákon Jarl when he had cast off Christianity, which had been forced upon him, and, on his journey home to Norway from Jutland, was driven out of his course to the coasts of East Gothland by a storm, that he landed there and made preparations for a great sacrifice. During the sacrifice two ravens came flying along and croaked loudly. By this appearance the Jarl thought he saw that Odin had accepted the offering and would grant him success in battle. He therefore burned all his ships, and, sword in hand, cut his way with his army through the whole of Gothland back to Norway.‡

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* The O. Edda: Helgakviða Hundingsbana, II., 32.

† Hervarar S. 5; Eyrb. S. 44; Fornm. S. V. p. 250; Völuspá 28.

‡ Snor.: Ol. Tryggv. S. 28.

The fallen warrior rejoiced in his dying hour that by Odin's invitation he should go to Valhalla and drink ale with the Æsir; as the ancient skald makes Ragnar Loðbrók sing in the den of serpents:

"Home bid me the Dísir,
Whom, from the warrior-halls,
Odin has sent me;
Glad shall I with the Æsir
Drink ale in the high-seat.
Loathsome are life's hours;
Laughing shall I die."*

It is often related in the ancient legends that Odin would make his appearance before or during a battle, either to secure the victory to his favorites, or to set a limit to their victorious career on earth and summon them away to himself.

Odin lent his spear to Dag Högnason that he might slay with it the hero Helgi Hundingsbani, whose spirit, therefore, met with the most distinguished reception in Valhalla. "Odin," it is stated, "invited him to share in the rule of all things with himself."†

As an aged one-eyed man with a slouched hat upon his head, Odin once made his appearance in King Völsúng's hall and selected Sigmund, the king's son, as his favorite, by presenting to him a sword. Sigmund became a victorious hero, but when his time was come Odin again appeared to him in the same form, in the midst of a battle, and held his spear before his sword. The sword broke, and Sigmund was left severely wounded upon the battle-field. His wife wished to cure him but he declined her help; "Odin," said he, "wishes not that I shall swing my sword again after it is once broken; I have fought as long as it was his will."*

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* Krákumál 29.

† The O. Edda: Helgakv. Hundingsb. II. 36, et sup.

The Danish King Harald Hildatand was from his childhood consecrated to Odin, and he was afterwards throughout his whole life led on by this God to victory. But in his advanced age Odin involved him in a quarrel with his nephew, Sigurd Ring, then with his own hand, under the semblance of Brun, a military chief, guided the chariot of the blind king at the great battle of Brávalla Heath, and finally, in the tumult of battle, slew his favorite with his own war-club.†

When Styrbjörn Sviakappi—*i. e.*, Sweden's Champion—attacked his uncle the Swedish king Eirik Sigrsæli, the latter applied to Odin and offered himself up to him for the sake of victory. Odin appeared to him in the form of a large man with a slouched hat, reached him a reed and bade him shoot it over the hosts of Styrbjörn, with the words "Odin owns you all!" Eirik did as he was commanded, and the reed became a spear as it flew through the air above the enemy. Styrbjörn and his people were struck with blindness and buried beneath a mountain slide.‡

Sometimes, also, it was believed, Odin would call his favorites to himself, when not engaged in battle.

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* Völsúnga S. 3, 11, 12.

† Saxo Grammaticus 1, 7–8

‡ Styrb. þáttr, 2.

Vikarr, King of Hörðaland, it seems, was consecrated or given to Odin from his birth.* He became a mighty and victorious king, but was slain at last by his foster-brother Starkað, at the instigation of Odin. It happened that Vikarr and Starkað, on one of their Sea-roving expeditions, were delayed by a head-wind, and when the cause came to be inquired into, they learned that Odin required a man from among their hosts. Lots were therefore drawn, and the lot fell upon Vikarr. All were struck with terror, and it was resolved to reconsider the matter on the following day. But in the night Odin appeared to Starkað in the guise of his foster-brother Hrósshárs-Grani, bade him send Vikarr to him, and gave him a spear which seemed to be the stalk of a reed. On the next day they held a consultation on the sacrifice of Vikarr, and at the suggestion of Starkað it was concluded to undertake it for the sake of appearances. The king mounted the stump of a tree, and Starkað laid about his neck a piece of calf-gut, the other end of which was fastened to a tender fir-twig. Then Starkað touched him with the reed and said, "Now do I give thee unto Odin!" But in the same instant the stump tumbled away from under Vikarr's feet, the intestine around his neck became a withe, the twig, which sprang upward with force, swung him up into the tree, and the reed in Starkað's hand was transformed into a spear, which pierced through the body of the king.†

According to the Sagas, when Odin revealed himself he made his appearance in the form of an elderly, grave-looking, one-eyed man, usually clad in a green, blue, or spotted mantle, with a slouched hat upon his head and a spear in hand.*

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* Hálfs S. 1.

† Gautreks S. 7.

Although Odin is represented in the Asa Mythology as the highest of the Æsir, yet it appears that Thor did not hold an inferior place in the worship of the people, especially among the inhabitants of Norway and Iceland. There is evidence of this in the circumstance that temples dedicated to him alone, or in which he was the chief object of worship, are so often mentioned in the ancient Sagas, as well as the firm faith which not merely individual Northmen but the people of whole provinces of Norway are said to have placed in him in preference to any other deity of heathendom. There were temples dedicated to Thor on the island of Moster near Hörðaland, on Randsey near Naumdal, upon Thorsnes in Iceland, at Hundsthorp in Gudbrandsdal; he was the principal Divinity worshiped in the chief-temple at Mæri in Inner-Throndheim and at many other places in Norway. The people of Gudbrandsdal put their highest trust in Thor. When Thorolf Mostrarskegg wished to leave Norway, he consulted Thor in order to learn whither he should go, and Thor directed him to Iceland.† By Thor's direction, likewise, the Northman Kraku Hreiðar selected a dwelling-place upon that island,* and so did Helgi the Meagre, who went thither from Suðr-eyjar (South Islands).†

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* Völsunga S. 3, 11, 13; Norna-Gests S. 6; Hálfs S. 1; Snor.: Olaf Tryggv. S. 71; Ol. Tryggv. 5, in Skalh. 63; Hörðs S. 14.

† Eyrbyggja S. 4.

Those who trusted more to their own strength in battle than to the protection of Odin, worshiped Thor as the Bestower of Strength, and at the sacrificial festivals consecrated to him the first filled horn. This was done by making the sign of the Hammer over the horn, as is seen in the well-known history of King Hákon Athelsteins-fostri, who during a sacrificial festival at Hlaði made the sign of the Cross over the horn consecrated to Odin, an act which Sigurd Jarl explained by saying that the king did as all do who trust in their own strength; —he consecrated the horn to Thor by the sign of the Hammer.‡ It is not improbable that Thor's Hammer-sign was also employed in the marriage ceremonies of the Northmen, as a consecration of the union of man and wife, as well as at their funeral ceremonies, of which usage the type was in the myth of Thor, who consecrated Baldur's funeral pile with his Hammer.§ In both cases the sign of the Hammer was to frighten away evil Jötun-beings, and prevent them from disturbing the domestic peace of the married, and the repose of the dead in the grave.

Thor was also invoked by persons about to engage in wrestling. When the Icelander Thord, who was a very experienced wrestler, was going to try his strength with his countryman Gunnlaug Ormstúnga, he called upon Thor beforehand. Gunnlaug, however, tripped him and threw him upon the ground, but at the same time wrenched his own foot out of joint.* But it appears that the Northmen worshiped Thor especially to secure in him a protector against Trolls and Evil Powers of a Jötun nature, which were believed to have their abodes in mountains and wild, desert places. According to an ancient legend, he had delivered the inhabitants of Norway from these Powers; no wonder, therefore, that he was specially worshiped in that country.†

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* Landnb. III., 7.

† Ib. I., 12.

‡ Snor.: Hák. Góð. S. 18.

§ The L. Edda: Gylf. 49.

Thor was believed occasionally to reveal himself to men. In the form of a red-bearded man he made his appearance in the camp of the Swedish hero Styrbjörn, when the latter had invoked his aid against his uncle Eirik the Victorious, whom Odin protected.‡ As a young, red-bearded man of large stature and a beautiful countenance, strong and supple in wrestling, he revealed himself to King Olaf Tryggvason, and related to him how in the Olden Time, when the Northmen invoked his aid, he had with his Hammer beaten two Troll-women who tormented them.§ Thor's red-beard was, doubtless, to indicate the fiery nature of the Thunder-God.

That Njörð was an object of the zealous worship of the Northmen may be readily inferred, as he was believed to protect Sea-faring, in which our forefathers busied themselves so much, and it is said of him, in one of the Old Eddaic poems, that "he rules over temples and places of sacrifice innumerable."* Njörð and his son Frey are named in the heathen oath-formula of the Northmen;† they are called upon, in a poem of Egil Skallagrimsson, to banish Eirik Blood-axe and Queen Gunhilda from Norway;‡ they are represented by the same skald, in his *Arinbjarnar Drápa* as "Bestowers of Riches,"§ and the extremely rich are said to be "rich as Njörð."

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* Gunnlaugs Ormstúnga S. 10.

† Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 213.

‡ Styrb. þáttr, 2.

§ Ol. Tryggv. S. in Fornm. S. 213.

Still more numerous are the traces in our ancient Sagas of the widely-extended worship of Frey—the God of Fruitfulness—among the Northmen. In Throndheim there was a temple in Olaf Tryggvason's days, in which Frey was zealously worshiped. When the King, after he had overthrown the statue of the God, upbraided the landsmen for their stupid idolatry, and asked them wherein Frey had evinced his power, they answered, "Frey often talked with us, foretold us the future, and granted us good seasons and peace."‖

The Norse chieftain Ingemund Thorsteinsson, who in the days of Harald Hárfagri settled at Vatnsdal in Iceland, built near his homestead a temple which appears to have been specially dedicated to Frey, who had in a manner pointed out a dwelling-place to him; for in digging a place for his Öndvegis-súlur, or pillars of the High-seat, Ingemund found in the earth an image of Frey which he had lost in Norway.* The Icelander Thorgrim of Sjóbol was a zealous worshiper of Frey, and held sacrificial festivals in his honor during the winter nights. When Thorgrim was dead and buried, the snow never settled upon his funeral mound; this was believed to be a favor shown by Frey, for "the God loved him so for the sacrifices he had made that he would not have it to become cold between them."†

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* The O. Edda: Vafþrúðnismál, 38.

† Landnmb. IV. 7.

‡ Egils S. 58, 365.

§ Egils S. 80.

‖ Ol. Tr. S. Skalh. II. 49, 50.

In the vicinity of the estate of Thverá in Eyjafjörð in Iceland there was a temple to Frey, and the place became so holy that no criminal dared to tarry there; "Frey did not allow of it." When the chieftain Thorkel the Tall was expelled from Thverá by Glum Eyjólfsson, universally known by name of Viga-Glum, he led a full-grown ox to Frey's temple before he left, and said, "Long have I put all my trust in thee, Oh Freyr! Many gifts hast thou accepted of me and repaid them well; now do I give this ox to thee, that thou may one day cause Glum to leave this Thverá land even as much against his will as I do now. Do thou give me a sign that thou acceptest the offering!" At that moment the ox bellowed loudly and fell dead upon the ground. Thorkel considered this a good omen, and moved away with a lighter heart. Afterward,

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* Vatnsd. S. 10, 15.

† Gisl. Surs. S. 15, 18.

Glum, in his old days, became involved in a dangerous suit for manslaughter, which ended with his having to relinquish Thverá to the murdered man's son. On the night before he rode to the Assembly at which the case was to be decided, he dreamed that he saw Frey sitting on the banks of the stream; his own departed friends were beseeching the God that Glum might not be driven away from Thverá, but Frey answered them short and angrily, for he now remembered the ox which Thorkel the Tall had presented to him. After this dream and the subsequent forced removal, Glum no longer honored Frey so much as he had done before.*

In the temple at Upsala in Sweden, Frey, together with Odin and Thor, was especially worshiped;† and that in some provinces of Sweden the people put their highest trust in him, and even believed that he sometimes appeared in human form, is attested by the story—somewhat embellished, it is true—of the Northman Gunnar Helming, who gave himself out in Sweden as Frey.‡

The horse, it appears, was regarded as a favorite animal of Frey. At his temple in Throndheim it is said there were horses belonging to him.§ It is related of the Icelander Rafnkel Freysgoði that he loved Frey above all other gods, and bestowed upon him an equal share in all his best possessions. He had a brown horse, called Frey-faxi (Frey's horse), which he loved so highly that he made a solemn vow to slay the man who should ride this horse against his will, a vow which he also fulfilled.* Another Icelander, Brand, had a horse also called Frey-faxi which he made so much of that he was said to believe in it as in a Divinity.†

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* Viga-Gl. S., 5, 9, 19, 26.

† Adam of Bremen: de situ Daniæ, 233. The name Fricco which here occurs, can hardly refer to any other god than Freyr.

‡ Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 173.

§ Ol. Tr. S. Skalh. II. 49.

It was the same case with the swine, perhaps, as with the horse. The Boar Gullinbursti, with which Frey drove, has been already alluded to; and the story of the fabulous king Heiðrek, who on Yule-eve made solemn vows upon the Atonement-Boar (Sónar-gölltr),‡ sacred to Frey and Freyja, appears to refer to an actual custom of heathen antiquity; for we find also, in one of the prose supplements to the ancient Eddaic poem of Helgi Hjörvarðsson, that the Sónar-gölltr is mentioned, as being led out on Yule-eve, in order that they might, with hands laid upon it, make solemn vows.§

The worship of Baldur we find spoken of only in Frithjóf's Saga, which relates that in Baldur's grove, in Sokn, there was a great temple to many gods, among whom, however, Baldur was chiefly worshiped. So great was the sanctity of the place, it is stated, that not any violence whatever should be done to man or beast, nor could there be any sexual intercourse there.‖ Baldur's worship therefore bore the impress of the goodness and innocence of which he was himself the emblem.

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* Rafnk. Freysg. S. pp. 4, 6, 11.

† Vatnsd. S. 34.

‡ Hervarar S. 14.

§ "Um kveldit óru heitstrengingar; var framleiddr sónargölltr, lögðu menn þar á hendr sinar, ok strengðu menn á heit at bragarfulli." The O. Edda: Helgakviða Hjörvarðs-sonar, 30.

‖ Friðþjófs S. 1.

Of the worship of Forseti among the Northmen, we have, indeed, no very positive information; but we find that this god was zealously worshiped by the Frisians, and that he had a very holy temple on an island which was called after him Foseteslant, the Helgoland of the present day.*

To Bragi the heathen Northmen consecrated the replenished horn, called Bragi's Horn (Bragarfulli), which was emptied at the great festivals while solemn vows were made. Bragi, the god of the Skaldic art, was to hear the vows relating to the great deeds, whose memory was to be delivered to posterity through the mouth of the Skald.

Only a few traces of the worship of the Asynjur, or Goddesses, are to be found in the ancient poems and Sagas. Concerning a certain Otar, it is stated in the Eddaic poem Hyndluljóð, that he always put his trust in the Asynjur. The Valkyrja Sigrdrifa, when she awakes from her enchanted sleep, salutes the Æsir and Asynjur.† Borgny, a king's daughter, calls upon Friga and Freyja to reward Oddrún, who had been with her during severe pangs of childbirth and had assisted at her delivery.‡ When King Rerer and his wife called upon the Gods for offspring, Friga and Odin, it is stated, heard their prayers and presented them with a son.§ Signy, the Queen of King Alfrek of Hörðaland, invoked the aid of Freyja when she was going to vie with the king's other wife, Geirhild, in ale-brewing. It seems that the king had to get rid of one of them on account of their irreconcilable enmity toward each other, so he declared that he would retain the one who brewed the best ale. Signy, however, was foiled by her rival, for the latter had called upon Odin, who revealed himself to her in advance, in the form of a certain Hött; and as he gave her his spittle for yest, Geirhild's ale became the best.*

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* J. Grimm: Deut. Myth. pp. 210, 212.

† The O. Edda: Sigrdrifumál, 4.

‡ Ib.: Oddrúnargrátr, 10.

§ Völsúnga S. 2.

Friga and Freyja, as the highest among the Asynjur, were, without doubt, the most especially worshiped. In a temple in Iceland their statues are said to have been seated upon a throne opposite those of Thor and Frey. When the Icelander Hjalti Skeggjason, newly converted to Christianity, wished to express his contempt for the heathen Gods, he, in a ditty, called Freyja a bitch, and Hallfred Vandræðaskald, in a verse that he made at Olaf Tryggvason's request, in order to display his Christian disposition, names Freyja among the Gods whom he had forsaken for Christ.†

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* Hálfs S. 1.

† Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 217, 170.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INFERIOR DEITIES AS OBJECTS OF WORSHIP.

Beside the Æsir proper, there were also certain inferior Divinities arising out of the Asa-Faith, which were honored and adored by the heathen Northmen. Of this class of superior beings were the Dísir Landvættir, and Álfar.

The name Dísir (*sing.* Dís) properly denotes Goddesses, but it is used especially of a peculiar kind of supernatural beings, who also frequently appear under the appellations: Hamingjur (*sing.* Hamingja), the Goddesses of Good Fortune, and Fylgjur (*sing.* Fylgja), Following, Attending Spirits. They were nearly related to the Valkyrjur and Nornir, especially to the latter, whose messengers they were strictly considered to be. They were imagined to be feminine beings, who, mostly as protective, but sometimes as persecuting, spirits, attended the single individual or whole races, throughout this earthly life. They revealed themselves on important occasions, sometimes to the waking eye, sometimes in dreams, and in the latter case they were also called Dream-wives (Draumkonur).

When the Icelandic chieftain Thorstein Ingemundsson, of Hof, in Vatnsdal, was invited as a guest of Groa, a magic-skilled woman who dwelt in his neighborhood, he dreamed for three successive nights before the festival, "that the woman who had been the attendant of him and his family" showed herself unto him and forbade him to go thither. He obeyed, and staid at home with his friends. But on the very day that the festival was to have been, Groa's house was buried beneath a mountain slide, which was called forth by her sorcery.*

The renowned and mighty Icelander, Viga-Glum, dreamed one night that he stood on his estate Thverá, and saw a woman coming toward him, who was so large that her shoulders reached the mountain-tops upon both sides of the valley. He interpreted this dream to signify that his uncle, the Norwegian hersir Vigfus, was now dead, and the woman was his Good Fortune (hamingja), which was higher than the mountains, and which now took up its abode with Glum.†

When Hallfred Vandræðaskald lay deathly sick in his ship, a woman was seen to walk along with it. She was of a goodly aspect and was clad in armor; she walked over the waves as though it had been upon firm land. Hallfred looked upon her and saw that it was his Fylgja-kona (Guardian Spirit), but as he had embraced Christianity, he was anxious she should not accompany him in the realms of death, and he said to her, "I now declare myself to be separated from thee!" "Wilt thou accept me?" she asked of Thorvald, Hallfred's brother. He answered in the negative. Then said Hallfred the Younger, a son of the skald, "I will accept thee!"*

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* Vatnsd. S., 36.

† Viga-Gl. S., 9.

It is said, however, of the hopeful Icelandic youth Thiðrandi Hallsson, that he was slain by the Dísir of his family. It was shortly after the introduction of Christianity into Iceland, that Thiðrandi's father Hall, on a winter night, gave a banquet (no doubt a sacrificial banquet in honor of the Dísir) at his estate of Hof, on Alpta-fjörð. The soothsayer Thorhalli, who was among the guests, forbade any one to go out at night; for whoever did so would bring about some mishap. When all had gone to bed there were three raps upon the door, but no one heeded it, except Thiðrandi, who lay nearest to the door. He, believing it to be guests who had arrived, sprang up with the third rap and went out with his sword in hand. As he perceived nothing at first, he went a little way from the door; but now he heard the trampling of horses' feet, and saw nine women in black ride from the North, bearing drawn swords, and nine women in light clothing, upon white horses, ride across the fields from the South. He now wished to go in; but the women in black came in his way and attacked him. He defended himself bravely, but fell at last. Some time afterward his father awoke and missed him. They sought Thiðrandi, and soon found him lying sorely

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Magnusen's Eddalære. Vol. IV. p. 45: (from Hallfred's Saga).

wounded. He related his vision, and died in the morning. The wise Thorhalli explained this whole occurrence to be a warning of a change of Faith. The women had been the Dísir of his family; those in black had favored the ancient faith, which was now soon to be forsaken. They had wished to obtain a tribute from the family before they left it, therefore had they slain Thiðrandi, whom the light Dísir had sought in vain to defend. But these same light Dísir were to protect the race, when they should have accepted the new faith.*

The Icelander Gísli Sursson related of himself, that he had two Draum-konur; the one was ever friendly toward him, the other always foretold him evil. When he roved about outlawed and unfortunate, the latter made her appearance the oftenest, and would sprinkle him with blood; but occasionally the former consoled him, and once she showed him his place of abode, where she promised him a happy sojourn after death.†

When a person's good fortune was on the wane, it was ascribed to the anger or imbecility of his Dísir; and then it was also said that his Dísir were dead or had forsaken him. In Hálf's Saga, in the poetic altercation between Hálf's champion Utsteinn and the Dane, Ulf the Red, the former says:

"Up should we rise,
Forth should we go,
And loudly make
Our shields resound;

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* Ol. Tr. S. in. Fornm. S. 215.

† Gísli Surs. S. 22, 24, 30, 33.

I trust that our Dísir,
Helmet-covered,
Hither have come
To Denmark."

To which Ulf answers:

"Dead may all
Your Dísir be;
Fortune has fallen
From Hálf's champions!"*

In the old Eddaic poem, Grimnismál, Odin says to King Geirröð, just before the latter falls by his own sword:

"I know life is leaving thee,
Unpropitious are thy Dísir."†

In the Altamál, Glaumvör says to her husband Gunnar, whom, on hearing the recital of his ill-boding dream, she vainly tries to dissuade from the journey in which he met with his death:

"I fear that thy Dísir
Have all forsaken thee!"‡

When it occurs in the Sagas that a powerful man gives his Good Luck (hamingja, gipta) to one whom he sends on a dangerous errand, or to whom he in any way wishes well—an expression still used in Christian times—the idea was conveyed originally, that the Dísir of the one, in such cases, took the other for a time or for ever under their protection. When the Icelandic Chieftain Höskuld, on his death-bed, divided his property among his sons, but was not able to let his unmarried son Olaf, whom he loved the most, share equally with the other sons against their will, he bestowed upon him, besides a few costly treasures, his own and his kinsmen's Good Luck (gipta); he knew very well, he added, that it had already taken its place with Olaf.* When the Norwegian King Olaf Haraldsson sent his chief marshal Björn into Sweden, on a difficult errand, Björn's companion, the Icelander Hjalti Skeggjason, though a Christian, begged the king to bestow upon them his hamingja upon their journey; and the king replied that he would do so if it were really of any importance.†

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* Hálfs S. 15.

† The O. Edda: Grimn. 53.

‡ Ib.: Atlam. 25.

The expressions kynfylgja (family attendant) and ættarfylgjur, which sometimes occur in the Sagas in signification of the cleverness or power which was peculiar to some family,‡ refer to the belief in attendant and guardian spirits as the origin of the predominating qualities of that family.

The belief in this kind of Dísir or protecting Goddesses being so universal among the heathen Northmen, nothing could be more natural than that they should endeavor by worship to gain over and strengthen the favor of these beings. This was doubtless the object of the so-called Dísa-blót or Dísa Sacrifices, which are mentioned in many places in the sagas, and which appear to have been held chiefly in autumn upon Winter-night. Of the Kings Helgi and Halfdan of Sokn, the sons of Bele, it is stated, that they were gone to attend the Dísa-blót in

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* Laxdæla S. 26.

† Snor.: Ol. Hel. S. 68.

‡ Völsunga S. 4; Þorð. Hreð. S. 8.

Baldur's temple, when Frithjof brought them the tribute from the Orkney Islands; and as a part of the same temple is mentioned a distinct edifice under the name of Dísarsalr—the Dísa Hall.* King Adils of Upsala lost his life by his horse stumbling under him, when at a Dísa-blót he was riding around in the Dísir hall.† Alfhild, daughter of King Alf in Alfheim, was carried off by Starkað, as she was engaged in sprinkling blood upon the altar one night at a great Dísa sacrifice which her father held one autumn.‡ The Norse King Eirik Blood-axe and his Queen Gunhilda held Dísa-blót at a royal palace at Atley, in western Norway,§ and of the Norwegian hersir Vigfus it is stated, that he held great festivals and Dísa sacrifices on Winter-night, which solemnities all his people were to remember.‖

There are two beings which may doubtless be reckoned with this class of Divinities, which are often mentioned in our ancient Sagas as an object of worship, although we do not find them named among the actual Gods: they are the sisters Thorgerd Hörgabrúd and Yrp. Of Thorgerd, who is the oftenest named, it is stated that she was a daughter of King Haulgi (the Holy), after whom Halogaland is said to have received its name. Both the father and daughter were worshiped by sacrifices, and Haulgi's funeral mound was built up of alternate layers of gold and silver, and of mold and stone.* This account can imply little else than that Thorgerd was a Divinity peculiar to the Haleygir, or rather, to the renowned race of Hlaða-Jarls, from Halogaland descended, and therefore was their *Dís* or Protecting Goddess. She was specially worshiped by the most famous man of this family, Hákon Sigurdsson Jarl. It is stated that during the battle with the Jómsvíkingar, he sacrificed to her his little son who was but seven years old, in order to gain her help. She accordingly made her appearance in a raging hail-storm from the North, and the enemy believed they saw her and her sister Yrp upon the Jarl's ship amid the storm; while from every one of their outstretched fingers an arrow was flying, and each arrow became the death of a man.† In Gudbrandsdal she and Yrp, together with Thor, were worshiped in a temple, which Hákon Jarl and the Chieftain Gudbrand owned in fellowship.‡ In western Norway she had likewise a temple fitted up in the most magnificent style, in which this same Hákon Jarl worshiped her with the highest veneration.§ Even in Iceland Thorgerd was worshiped with several of the Gods in a temple at Ölvus-vatn, and was regarded as a guardian spirit of the Chieftain Grimkel and his family, who came originally from Orkadal.‖

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* Friðþ. S. 5 and 9.

† Snor.: Yngl. S. 33.

‡ Hervarar S. 1.

§ Egils S. 44.

‖ Viga-Gl. S. 6.

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* The L. Edda: Skálda, 44.

† Jomsvíkinga S. (Copenh. 1824) Ch. 14; Fornm. S. XI. p. 134; Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 90.

‡ Niáls S. 89.

§ Fareyinga S. 23.

‖ Saga af Hörði, 1, 18.

Thorgerd's universal surname Hörgabrúðr, signifies the Bride of the Altar or place of sacrifice (from hörgr, altar, sacrificial inclosure), and has reference to her supposed sanctity. She was also called Haulgabrúðr, which doubtless denotes the Bride or Goddess of the Haleygir.

The appellation Fylgja, which, as already appears, was synonymous with Dís or Hamingja, was also used, though mostly of a kind of beings which were believed to attend on mankind under the form of animals, or rather to go before them. These Fylgjur were imagined to be a lower order of spirits than the proper Dísir or Hamingjur, and there are scarcely any traces to be found of their having been objects of worship. Every man was believed to have his Animal-Fylgia, and we usually find that the animal was conceived to be in some degree corresponding with the character or standing of the man. Thus cunning folks were said to have foxes for their Fylgjur; wild warriors, wolves; powerful chieftains, eagles, oxen, bears, or other strong animals.* The men who had powerful Fylgjur were more difficult to be overcome and more feared than those who had weak ones. "The brothers have strong Fylgjur (rammar fylgjur)" said the Icelandic Sorcerer Thorolf concerning the sons of Ingemund of Hof, when he foresaw that they were going to attack him.† The veteran Vifil said likewise, when it had been revealed to him in a dream that King Froði was drawing near his dwelling to search for his nephews Hroar and Helgi, whom Vifil had concealed from his attempts: "Great and mighty Fylgjur have come hither to the island!"* The wise Icelander Einar Eyjólfsson dreamed that he saw a noble, strong-horned ox walking up along Eyja-fjörð until it came to the estate Möðruvell, when it went to every house and at last to the High-seat, where it fell down dead. Einar said that the dream was significant, and that it was a man's Fylgja which had made its appearance. On the same day his brother Gudmund the Mighty came home from a journey to his estate Möðruvell, and died suddenly soon after he had seated himself in the high-seat.†

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* Niáls S. 23, 61; Völs. S. 34; Órvar-Odds S. 4; Þorstein Víkingssons S. 12, &c., &c.

† Vatnsd. S. 30.

The Fylgjur mostly appeared in dreams. In the Eddaic poem, Atla-mál, where Kostbera relates her evil-boding dream to her husband Högni, she says among other things: "Methought there flew an eagle through the house; it besprinkled us all with blood; it seemed by its threatening mien to be the guise of Atli."‡ When Queen Auð related to her husband, King Rörek, that she had dreamed of a Stag which was slain by a Dragon, Rörek said, "Thou has seen the Fylgjur of Kings."§

The Fylgjur made their appearance more especially as the forerunners of the arrival of those to whom they belonged, and a sudden irresistible drowsiness was thought to herald the approach of these beings. Thus it is stated of the Troll-man Svan, that he yawned greatly and said, "Now come Osvif's Fylgjur," (nu sækja at fylgjur Osvifs).*

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* Saga Hrólfs Kraka, 2.

† Ljósvetninga S. 21.

‡ The O. Edda: Atlam. 19.

§ Sögubrót, 2.

Sometimes, also, the Fylgjur were seen by persons in a waking state, but it was only by those who were gifted with a supernatural sense. It is related of the wise Icelander Niál, that he one night would not lie down to sleep, but walked out and in continually. When asked what was the cause of this, he answered, "Many things pass before my eyes; I see many grim Fylgjur of Gunnar's enemies." In the same night his friend Gunnar, of Hliðarendi was attacked by his enemies.† Once, as the boy Thorstein, who was afterwards called Ox-foot, ran in across the floor in his foster-parents' house, and fell down there, a wise old man named Geiter, who happened to be present, began to laugh. The boy asked him the reason, and he answered, "I saw what thou didst not see; a white bear's cub ran into the room before thee, and it was over it that thou fell." By means of this vision the Sage discovered that Thorstein was of a more distinguished family than was generally supposed.‡

What the Dísir were for the individual man or family, were the Landvættir* believed to be for whole provinces and their inhabitants, but in such a manner that they were properly bound to the place, and not to the people, with whom they were connected only in-so-far as they were inhabitants of a certain district.

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* Niáls S. 12.

† Niál var þessa nótt i þórólfsfelli ok mátti ekki sofa, ok gekk ýmist út eða inn. þórhilldr spurði Niál hvi hann mætti ekki sofa? "Margt berr nú fyrir augu mir," sagði hann. "Ek se margar fylgjur grimmligar úvina Gunnars, ok er nokkut undarliga."

Niáls S. 70.

‡ Fornm. S. III, p. 113.—Concerning Dísir and Fylgjur much excellent information is given in Magnusen's Eddalære, Vol. IV, pp. 35–49.

It is most probable that the heathen Northmen believed their country to be under the special protection of some one of the Æsir, probably of Thor, and that it is this Protecting-God which the Skald Egil Skallagrimsson means by the Land-Ás whose hostility he, in a poem, calls down upon King Eirik Blood-axe.† The Landvættir, however, were beings of less importance, who protected the smaller districts of the country, and on whose favor the prosperity of the inhabitants in a great measure depended. Hence is derived a provision which occupied the first place in the heathen laws of Iceland; that "no one shall have ships on the sea bearing figure-heads upon the prow; but if any one have such, he shall remove the heads before coming in sight of land, and not sail toward the land with gaping heads and out-stretching snouts, lest the Protecting Spirits of the Land (Landvættir) should be frightened thereby." That a similar belief was prevalent in Norway is evinced by the proceedings of Egil Skallagrimsson when he wished to avenge himself on King Eirik Blood-axe and Queen Gunhilda. He went up, it is stated, on an island near the coast of Norway and set up a hazel-stake in a cleft of the rocks facing the land, and fastened a horse's head upon the stake. Thereupon he said, "Here do I raise up a Nithing-post* and turn the disgrace against King Eirik and Queen Gunhilda." He turned the head toward the land and continued, "I turn this disgrace against the Protecting Deities of the Land which inhabit this country, so that they shall all run wildly about, without ever being able to find their homes, until they have driven out King Eirik and Queen Gunhilda from the country."† The enmity of the Landvættir was thus believed to be the cause of King Eirik's later misfortunes, when with his wife and children he had to fly from Norway.

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* Land-guardians, from land, and vættr or vætt, a genius, spirit,

† Egils S, 58.

On the other hand it was believed that the man who enjoyed the favor of the Landvættir was peculiarly fortunate. Thus it is related of the Icelander Björn, a son of Molda-Gnúp, one of the original settlers, that he made a covenant with a mountain spirit (bergbúi) which appeared to him in a dream, and from that hour Björn's cattle multiplied incredibly. It was said, moreover, that clairvoyants (ófreskir menn—men endowed with supernatural vision, ghost-seers) could see how all the Guardian Deities of the land accompanied Björn when he rode to the Assemblies, and his brothers when they went out on fishing excursions.*

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* Niðstaung, a stake set up in disgrace of some one, which it was believed had power to bring harm upon the party it was directed against. It is probably derived from nið, infamy, disgrace; *A.-S.* nið, wickedness. The term Niðing, both among the Northmen and Anglo-Saxons, conveyed ideas of consummate wickedness, baseness, and contemptibleness, and was employed as an expression of the highest degree of infamy and disgrace that could be heaped upon any one.

† Egils S. 60.

The Landvættir were believed to be of various forms; in some places they were great animals, in others, again, they were giants. When the Danish King Harald Gormsson had the intention of attacking Iceland, he sent out beforehand—so the account goes—a magic-skilled man, who was to explore the country. The sorcerer goes forth in the form of a whale, but he finds every mountain and promontory upon the island filled with Landvættir both great and small. When he came to Vápnafjörð and was about to go up, there met him from the upper valley a great Dragon with many snakes and toads in its train, which cast forth venom upon the sorcerer and forced him to fly. When he came to Eyjafjörð a bird flew against him, which was so large that its wings reached the mountains upon each side of the valley, and a crowd of large and small birds followed it. In Breiðafjörð he met a great beast which waded out into the sea and bellowed dreadfully; many Landvættir accompanied him also. Finally, at Reykjanes he saw a mountain-giant with an iron staff in his hand; his head towered above the mountain-tops, and many Jötuns followed him. Intelligence concerning the powerful Guardian Spirits of this island had, it seems, the effect of deterring King Harald from the intended invasion of Iceland.†

It is quite certain that in Norway and Iceland the Landvættir were most commonly considered as belonging to the Jötun race, and as dwelling chiefly in the mountains. To regard the Jötuns as still being in a manner the actual owners of the country with reference to inanimate nature, was fully in accordance with the dogmas of the Asa-faith; and that, although the Jötuns on the whole were recognized as evil beings, yet the people still endeavored by a kind of worship to make friends of the few within whose territory they lived, and whose influence they imagined themselves to feel continually—this was but a natural consequence of the usual conception which heathens form of supernatural beings in general, and of their influence on human life.

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* Landnmb. IV. 12.

† Snorri: Ol. Tr. S. 37.

The third kind of inferior Deities which the heathen Northmen worshiped was the Elves (Álfr, a spirit; *plur.* Álfar). The belief in them rests wholly upon the Asa doctrine, which represents the Elves as the inhabitants of that region of the atmosphere nearest to the Earth's surface, and of the interior of the Earth. The former were called properly, Light-Elves (Ljósálfar), the latter, Dark-Elves (Dökkálfar);* but the two classes were blended together at an early period in the popular faith, and it appears to have been a very general belief that the Earthly Elves were neither black nor evil. It was thought that in their whole nature and appearance they were like men, and that they had their dwellings in mounds. They showed themselves occasionally and were thought to have power to do both good and evil to the people who lived in their vicinity. Therefore men sought to gain their friendship by sacrifices (Álfablót) and by services, whenever the Elves might demand them.

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* The L. Edda: Gylf. 17.

When the Icelander Thorvard Eysteinsson had been severely wounded in a hólmgang with Kormak Augmundsson, and his wound was very difficult to heal, he applied to a certain Thordis Spákona for counsel. She told him that at a short distance there was a mound in which the Elves lived. He must get the blood of the ox that Kormak, according to common usage, had slaughtered as an offering after the duel; with this blood he must sprinkle the mound and at the same time give the Elves a banquet of the flesh; then he should become healed. Her advice was followed and Thorvard speedily recovered his health.* Sighvat, the Skald of Olaf the Saint, on a journey through Gothland, stopped at a country house to find shelter for the night, but the mistress, who was standing in the door, forbade him, for they were just then engaged in "Álfablót" or sacrifices to the Elves.† In Hrolf Ganger's Saga, which in reality is a fiction of the fourteenth century, but which in single fragments throws light on the customs and the modes of thinking of olden times, there are also found traces of the Elfen-faith. Once, when Hrolf, the hero of the Saga, has been long in pursuit of a stag which it had been enjoined upon him to take, he comes towards evening to a clearing in the woods and there he sees a beautiful grass-covered mound. As he approaches it, the mound opens and an elderly woman in a blue cloak steps out. She compassionates Hrolf for the vain labor he has had, but promises to procure him the stag, which belongs to her, if he will go with her into the mound and assist her daughter, who has been nineteen days in the pains of child-birth and cannot be delivered until she is touched by a living human being (mennskr maðr). Hrolf followed the Elf-woman and came into a beautiful apartment. The sick woman was delivered when he touched her, and he received the stag in return, together with a gold ring.*

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* Kormaks S. 22.

† Snorri: Ol. Hel. S. 92.

The Dísir were often reckoned among the Elves, and sometimes also the Landvættir.

The Elfen-faith has been kept up until the present time among the people of Norway and Iceland, in the belief in the Huldra-fólk, or rather Huldu-fólk (the concealed, invisible Folk), and likewise in Denmark in the belief in Elle-folk (the Elves or Fairies).

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* Gaungu-Hrólfs S. 15.

CHAPTER XIX.

IMAGES OF THE GODS.

THE Northmen, like most other heathen nations, had images of their Gods. The object of these images was originally to make manifest to the senses the attributes of the Gods, and thus secure the devotion of the less enlightened classes. But in course of time, at least with the great mass, the image became confounded with the Divinity by whom it was thought to be animated, and thus became an object of that worship properly due to the superior being, of which it was only the representative. Thus arose Image-Worship among the Northmen as among so many other nations, and became a productive source of the grossest superstition.

However [rude we may consider the Plastic Art to have been among our heathen forefathers, in comparison with what it was among the Greeks and Romans, and what it now is among the enlightened nations of Europe, still it was sufficiently cultivated at an early period, for the purpose of making, out of such material as could be obtained, a likeness of the bodily form under which they conceived of the various Gods. These images it appears, were usually of wood, sometimes of metal, and but very seldom of stone. They were called goð (Gods) or skurðgoð (carved Gods); although the latter term may possibly be from the Christian times, when the effort was made to cast all possible odium on the worship of idols. No images have been preserved which may be regarded with certainty as relics of the Asa worship. This is to be attributed partly to the zeal of the first propagators of Christianity in destroying all idols, partly to the perishable material of which they were mostly made, and partly, no doubt, to the lack of real beauty in them, for when the belief in their sacredness was departed, they could no longer inspire as mere works of Art. It is therefore from the old written accounts alone, and especially from our Sagas, that we are able to draw any information of the precise nature of the idols of our heathen forefathers.

Whenever these are mentioned they are described as being in human likeness, sometimes full-sized and sometimes smaller, having the appearance and the attributes corresponding to the presumed essence and qualities of the God whom they were intended to represent. The large statues which had their place in the temples, were often hung with drapery and costly ornaments, and generally stood upon an elevation or pedestal (stallr or hjallr), which appears at at the same time to have served as an altar. Sometimes also they had images of the Gods on the prow of their war-ships, perhaps as a kind of figure-head. Smaller images were carried about their persons as amulets.

In the ancient temple at Upsala, according to the testimony of Adam of Bremen, there were statues erected to Thor, Odin (Wodan), and Frey (Fricco). The statue of Thor had the most conspicuous place in the middle; the two others stood one upon each side. Thor was represented with a sceptre (the Hammer, no doubt) in his hand; Odin, as the God of War, was in armor; and Frey, in the character of the God of Fruitfulness, was delineated as a Priapus.* In general, Odin's statues are not distinctly mentioned in the Sagas, but Thor's very often. In the chief-temple of Mæri in Inner Throndheim, Thor's statue had the principal place. The statue was large and richly adorned with gold and silver. The God was represented sitting in a splendid car, to which were attached two goats, ingeniously wrought of wood. Both the car and the bucks stood upon wheels, and about the horns of the bucks was slung a silver chain, by which the whole group was drawn. It was all so well made that it awakened the astonishment of King Olaf Tryggvason when he entered the temple.†

In a temple at Hundsthorp in Gudbrandsdal stood a large, much-honored statue of Thor. It was of wood, hollow within, and in the likeness of a man. It was adorned with gold and silver, held a hammer in its hand, and stood upon an elevation (hjallr). The peasants led this statue forth with great solemnity to meet Olaf the Saint when he came into Gudbrandsdal to convert them to Christianity; but St.

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* Ad. Brem.: de situ Daniæ, cap. 233.

† Ol. Tr. S. Skalh. II, 24.

Olaf caused one of his men to break it in pieces.* A wooden statue of Thor stood among several idols, all upon elevations (stallar), in a temple in Throndheim owned by a rich landsman, Finn.† In the temple in Gudbrandsdal, which Hákon Jarl and Dala-Gudbrand owned together, Thor was represented upon a car and adorned with gold rings. At the same place was also the statue of Hákon's tutelary Goddess, Thorgerd Hörgabrúð, in a sitting posture, as large as a full grown person, with a *falld* (a kind of head-dress) upon her head and a gold ring upon her arm. The statue of Yrp was also there and had likewise gold rings upon its arms.‡ In another temple owned by Hákon Jarl, the statue of Thorgerd stood upon a *stallr;* it was splendidly adorned and had a gold ring upon its arm.§ In the temple at Baldur's-haug in Sokn, there is said to have been many idols, among which the statue of Baldur is expressly mentioned.‖ Many idols are also mentioned as being in a temple at Ölvusvatn in Iceland.¶ In another temple on the island belonging to a certain Bersi, sat Frey and Thor in the High-Seat, and directly opposite them Friga and Freyja; these statues were arrayed in drapery and ornaments of gold and silver.** Eirik Hákonsson

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* Snor.: Ol. Hel. S. 118, 119; Ol. Hel. S. in Fornm. S. IV., 107, 108.

† Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 202, 203.

‡ Niáls. S. 89.

§ Fareyinga S. 23; Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 184.

‖ Friðþ. S. 9.

¶ Hörðs S. 18.

** Droplauga Sonar S. 26.

Jarl, at the beginning of the battle of Svöldr, had Thor's statue on the prow of his ship, but he had it taken down afterwards and a crucifix set up in its stead.[*] The Foster-brothers' Saga mentions a chair, which had carved upon its arms or side-posts the image of Thor with his Hammer.[†] A highly-valued wooden statue of Frey was found in a temple in Throndheim, which King Olaf Tryggvason hewed in pieces in the presence of the people.[‡] Kjötvi the Rich, King of Agðir, who fought against Harald Hárfagri, had a weight upon which the God Frey was sculptured in silver. This treasure, which he held in great veneration, fell after the battle into the hands of King Harald, and he presented it to his friend, the chieftain Ingemund Thorsteinsson, who afterwards carried the image in a purse and held it in very high esteem.[§] This last-mentioned image was probably borne as an amulet, as was often the case, no doubt, with the gold bracteates which are found in the burial mounds and in the earth, having upon them the images of men and animals, whose signification it is now impossible to decide, and which are furnished with a clasp for fastening to a necklace.

Images of clay or dough in human form are also spoken of, which were privately worshiped even after the introduction of Christianity.[‖]

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[*] Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 252, 253.

[†] Fostbræðra S. 38.

[‡] Ol. Tr. S. Skalh. II., 49, 50.

[§] Vatnsd. S. 9, 10.

[‖] "Matblót eða leirblót gort i mannslíki af leiri eða af deigi." Anc. Laws of Norw. I., p. 383.

How great the superstition of many of the Northmen was in regard to the idols, is attested by many passages in the Sagas, although it must be confessed that the superstition and blind zeal of the first Christian teachers gave rise to divers extravagances in these accounts. The peasants placed food every day before a statue of Thor in Gudbrandsdal, and believed that the God consumed it.* Of Thorgerd Hörgabrúð's statue it is related that it made known to Hákon Jarl the Goddess's delight in his offerings, by bending down its arm so that he was enabled to draw off the only gold ring which adorned it.† A statue of Thor at Rauðsey in Naumdal, is described as being so strengthened (magnat) by offerings, that it could speak with its worshiper Rauð, and accompany him about the island, that it could call forth storms by blowing in its beard, and could even play at the game of drawing hooks over a fire with King Olaf Tryggvason. In this sport, however, it came off a loser, fell into the fire and was destroyed.‡ When Dala-Gudbrand saw his temple burned down and the statues of his Gods lying out upon the ground unharmed, he cried out, "Great power is given unto our Gods, that they of themselves have gone out of the fire!" But Hákon Jarl, who was less blinded, said, "The Gods have not done this; some person has burned the temple and carried out the Gods. But" he continued, "the Gods do not avenge themselves suddenly. May the man who has done this be driven away from Valhalla and never come thither!" The outrage had been committed by Hrapp, an Icelander, who had been for a time a guest with Gudbrand.* It is related of the Icelander Grimkel that he saw the statues of the Gods in his temple preparing to move away from their seats, out of displeasure at his son Hörð.† Of a statue of Frey, in Sweden, the peasants had the belief that it had connubial intercourse with a woman who attended it.‡

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* Snor.; Ol. Hel. S. 118.

† Fareying. S. 23; Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 184.

‡ Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 145, 150.

Besides the proper idols there was a kind of sacred images, which was found in heathen times in the house of every Northman, namely, the so-called Öndvegis-súlur, or Pillars of the High-Seat, sometimes also called Setstokkar. These were two high wooden posts fashioned by hewing, which stood one upon each side of the High-Seat of the Master of the house, and had the lower end set in the ground.§ These Öndvegis-súlur were looked upon as peculiarly sacred, it might almost be said as a kind of Household Gods. It was a universal custom among the Northmen who left their native land to settle in Iceland, to take with them the Sacred Columns from their old homes, and cast them overboard when they first came in sight of Iceland; then they would select their place of residence on the spot where the columns were found drifted to land.

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* Þá tók Guðbrandr til orða: "Mikill máttr er gefinn goðum vorum, er þau hafa gengit sjálf úr elldinum!" "Eigi munu goðin þessu vallda," segir Jarl; "maðr mun brent hafa hofit, en borit út goðin. En goð hefna eigi allz þegar. Mun sá maðr braut rekinn úr Vallhöllu ok þar alldri koma, er þetta hefir gort." Niáls S. 89.

† Hörðs S. 18.

‡ Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 173.

§ Vatnsd. S. 15.

Thus did Ingólf, the first Northman who settled permanently upon the island.* It is related of Björn Ketilsson from Sokn, one of the first settlers, that when on his arrival he found his sacred pillars drifted into a bay, he believed that a home was shown him there.† Similar directions were followed by his sister Auð in choosing her abode.‡ The settler Thord Hrappsson had been living for ten or fifteen years upon the eastern side of Iceland when he learned that his sacred columns had been cast upon the western coast of the island; thereupon he straightway sold his estate, in order to remove thither.§ So also did another of the first settlers, Lomund the Old, from Vors.‖ When Eirik the Red, who went from Jaðar to Iceland, had loaned his Setstokkar (Posts of Honor) to another Icelander named Thorgest, and could not get them back again, it gave occasion for a quarrel, which cost the lives of many of the adherents of both parties, and at last was the cause of Eirik's banishment and settlement in Greenland.¶ Halstein Thorolfsson, who settled in the western part of Iceland, offered up his son, and gave him to Thor (perhaps devoted him to his service), in order that the God should furnish him with sacred columns of the High-Seat; whereupon, so the account goes, there shot up on his ground a tree sixty-three ells high, and two fathoms thick, from which not only he, but the whole surrounding neighborhood was supplied with Öndvegis-súlur.*

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* Landnámabók I, 8.

† Laxd. S. 3.

‡ Ib. 5; Kormaks S. 2.

§ Landnmb. I., 10.

‖ Ib. IV., 5.

¶ Ib. II., 14.

It is probable that the image of some one of the Gods was often carved upon these pillars, and that this contributed something to the veneration in which they were held. It appears, at least, that this was the case with the sacred columns which were sometimes to be found in the temples. Thus we are told that Thor's image was carved upon one of the Öndvegis-súlur, which had stood in a temple of Thor, on the island Moster in Norway, and which guided the Icelandic settler Thorolf Mostrarskegg to a place of abode.†

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* Landnmb. II., 23.

† Eyrbyggja S. 4.

CHAPTER XX.

SACRED EDIFICES.

Of the sacred buildings devoted to the worship of the Gods, two kinds are spoken of as being universal, namely, Hörg and Hof.

Hörg (hörgr, *plur.* hörgar) is the oftenest named in the ancient poems, sagas and laws,[*] but it is not particularly described; it is distinguished, however, from Hof, which was an appellation for the proper temples.[†] The Hörgar, so far as is known, were a kind of Stone-Altars or places of sacrifices under the open sky and surrounded by an inclosure of stones. They were consecrated to certain Deities; sometimes, perhaps, when they consisted of a single stone, regarded as statues or representatives of the Gods, and were besmeared with blood at the sacrifices. Thus it is stated in the Eddaic poem Hyndluljóð, where Freyja is introduced speaking to her favorite Ottar:

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[*] Landnmb. II., 16; Orv. Odds S. 29; Older Gula-þing Laws, cap. 29.

[†] The O. Edda: Völuspá 7; Vafþr. 38; Helgakv. Hjörv. 4.

> "A Hörg he made me
> Built up of stone,
> — Now is the stone
> Changed into glass—
> He sprinkled it over
> With the fresh blood of oxen;
> Ottar trusted ever
> To the Asynjur."*

Of Alfhild, a king's daughter, it is said that she was carried off by Starkað one night while she was sprinkling the Hörg with blood at a sacrifice to the Dísir.† We probably yet see the remains of such Hörgar in many of the stone-settings which are found in Norway and the neighboring countries. Especially is it likely that the stone-circles, which consist of large upright stones, somewhat pointed at the top and placed at moderate intervals from each other, belonged to this kind of sacrificial places, and perhaps the stones represented the statues of the Gods there worshiped. The great simplicity of these places of sacrifice, warrants the presumption that they are a more ancient arrangement than the actual temples.

The temples of the heathen Northmen were most usually called *hof;* they were also called goðahús (House of the Gods) or blóthús (House of Sacrifice). None of these buildings are left standing, so far as is known, not even any ruins of them, which might afford us some idea of their construction; for the first propagators of Christianity were very careful to have every building of the kind destroyed, or at least transformed into a Christian church, and under the transformation the older form was soon no longer to be recognized. We must, therefore, be content with the ancient descriptions, some of which, as they are found in our Sagas, are tolerably complete.

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* The O. Edda: Hyndluljóð 10.

† Hervarar S. 1.

When the Norse Chieftain Thorolf Mostrarskegg left Norway in order to settle in Iceland, he tore down the temple of Thor on the Island Moster, which he had presided over, and took with him most of the timber, together with the earth beneath the platform on which Thor's statue had been seated. When he had come to Iceland and had there, according to Thor's directions—or rather, according to the directions of the Sacred Columns upon which Thor's image was carved*—selected his place of abode at Thorsnes on the southern side of Breiðafjörd, he built on the spot a large *hof* of the same timber and probably in the same form as the torn-down temple of Moster. The door of this temple was in the side-wall, near one end; within the door stood the sacred columns, and in them there were nails which were called reginnaglar (nails of the Gods), but of their meaning no information is given. Within this house there was another, like the choir in Christian churches, and here, in the middle of the floor, stood a platform (stallr), and an altar upon which lay a ring with the ends unjoined (hríngr

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See above, Chap. XIX.

mótlauss) weighing two ounces. By this ring all oaths were taken, and the ruler was to wear it upon his arm at all meetings. On the platform stood the bowl for the sacrificial blood (laut-bolli), in which was the laut-teinn, a kind of sprinkling-rod with which they sprinkled the *laut*, or blood of animals sacrificed to the Gods. Around about the platform within the smaller house (afhúsit), were placed the statues of the Gods. Near at hand was the Doom-ring (dómhríngr), within which human beings were doomed to sacrifice, and within this ring stood Thor's Stone, upon which the victims were broken when about to be offered up. It was believed that traces of blood were still visible upon this stone long after the introduction of Christianity.*

The Icelandic chieftain Thorgrim, a son of the Northman Helgi Bjola, was a great performer of sacrifices. On his farm-land (tún) at Kjalarnes, in southwestern Iceland, he raised a temple one hundred feet long by sixty wide, in which Thor received the highest honors. It was built round inside like a cap (with a vaulted roof), and was all tented overhead (hung with tapestry). Thor's statue stood in the middle, the other Gods upon both sides. Before Thor stood an elevated place (stallr), made with great art, and covered on the top with iron. Upon this burned a fire which was never extinguished, called the sacred fire; there lay, also, upon it a large ring of silver which the hof-goði was to wear on his arm at all meetings, and by which all were to swear. There was, besides, upon it a large copper bowl, into which they collected the blood of the animals or men that were given to Thor. This they called *laut* or *lautbolli*, and out of it the people and cattle were to be sprinkled. The victim was to be served up at the banquet, but the human beings that were sacrificed, were thrown, after being killed, into a swampy pool near the door, which was called the sacrificial pool (blót-kéllda).*

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* Eyrb. S. 4, 10; Landnmb. II., 12.

By the former of these descriptions, which is undoubtedly very credible, it may be seen that in the heathen temples of the ancient Northmen, there was sometimes a distinction made between the inner Most-Holy, where the statues of the Gods were placed, and the outer part of the temple, doubtless the most spacious part, in which it may be presumed the sacrificial banquets were held. It must, therefore, have been this last-named part of the temple that is described elsewhere in the Sagas as being so constructed as to have fires burning along the floor, with the flesh-pots hanging over them and with seats upon each side for the accommodation of the guests.† This outer part of the temple is, doubtless, the same building which in other places is called the Dísarsalr. For instance, in Frithjof's Saga this is described as being the highest among the buildings of the temple in Baldur's grove, and constructed for the festivals with fires along the floor and seats upon the sides.‡ In the Ynglinga Saga, the Dísar hall of the temple at Upsala is described as having been so large that King Adils rode around inside of it.* It was necessary, also, that the building in which all the people of a large district were to assemble at the sacrificial festivals, should be very capacious. It is, moreover, possible that this special arrangement was peculiar to the public temples, which were common to the inhabitants of a whole district (fylki) or large portion of the country, while the smaller temples, which were often to be regarded as only the house-chapels of private individuals, were constructed in a different manner and perhaps more in accordance with the second of the above-mentioned ones.

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* Kjalnes S. 2.

† Snor.: Hák. Góð. S. 16.

‡ Friðþ. S. 5, 9.

We also find allusions to high board-fences (skiðgarðar, *mod. Norw.* Skidgaarde) surrounding the temples, and metallic rings, which were in the temple doors, probably for the purpose of drawing them up. In the door of the temple of Hlaði there was a ring, which was thought to be of gold, but which was afterwards discovered to be of copper within.

The temples of Norway, as well as all other buildings in that country in the earliest times, were built of wood; at least, we never find any temple of stone expressly mentioned, nor is it certain that the Northmen out of Norway—in Sweden, Denmark, or other countries—erected their temples of any more durable material.

When we find in many places in the Sagas, that the temples, especially the smaller ones, are spoken of as being tented inside or hung with tapestry, there is nothing improbable therein, for such decorations were much used in the houses of the Norse Chieftains of antiquity; but when it is said of the temple in which Hákon Jarl worshiped Thorgerd Hörgabrúd, that it was inwardly adorned with inlayings of gold and silver, and furnished with so many glass windows (glar-gluggar), that there was nowhere any shadow, it may be received as one of the embellishments added to the legend by a later age. Neither can we place implicit confidence in the glowing descriptions given of the Temple at Upsala, by Adam of Bremen and his commentator; for as the former speaks of it being "all decorated with gold" (so must we understand *totum ex auro paratum*), and the latter tells of the ever-green tree that grew by it, it appears that through ignorance they transferred the myths of the "gold-roofed Valhalla" and the "ever-green Ash Yggdrasill" to that last celebrated relic of the heathen worship of the Northmen.*

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* Snor.: Ynglinga S. 33.

The temples were sometimes dedicated to a single Deity, but much more frequently to several of them; there is even an account of one in Gothland containing one hundred statues of the Gods;† a statement, however, which appears to be exaggerated. But even when there were many Gods worshiped in a temple, it was mostly but one or two that occupied the first rank; and it has already been observed that in Norway and Iceland, Thor usually enjoyed this honor.‡

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* Ad. Brem.: de situ Daniæ, 138.

† Jomsv. S. in Fornm. S. XI. 12.

‡ Chap. XVII.

The temples were looked upon as sacred and inviolate; no deed of violence could be committed with impunity within their walls, nor upon their grounds. This sacredness was expressed in the ancient language by the name of Ve; and whosoever violated it was called "vargr i veum"—a wolf in the sanctuary—and was declared an outlaw to all persons. We find in the Sagas many traces of the veneration of the ancient Northmen for their temples. Of the great sanctity which rested upon the temple in Baldur's grove, in Sokn, we have before spoken. When the Icelander Hrapp had burned the temple in Gudbrandsdal, which Hákon Jarl and Dala-Guðbrand owned in fellowship, the Jarl declared the deed to be one which should shut out the perpetrator from Valhalla. The afore-mentioned Icelandic settler Thorolf Mostrarskegg, regarded as sacred the whole promontory of Thorsnes, which received its name because Thor's image had drifted to land there, and because the temple of Thor was erected upon it. The ground should not be defiled by blood shed in anger (heiptarblóð), nor by any of the baser necessities of nature; for the latter a rock along the coast was appointed. There was one isolated rocky hill upon the promontory which Thorolf held in special veneration. It was named Helgafell—the Holy Rock—and Thorolf believed that an abode was prepared in it for him and his family after death. It was so very holy that no one could look upon it before he had washed himself, and it was a place of refuge for both man and beast. Thorolf established a Heraðs-þing—a district court of justice—upon the extremity of the promontory. After his death, some of those who attended the court would not take the trouble to go out upon the rocks to attend to the calls of nature; thereupon arose a battle between those refractory persons and the inhabitants of Thorsnes. The Assembling-place (Þingvöllr) became defiled with blood, and this gave occasion for it to be removed higher up the promontory, for the ground upon which it had been could not now be considered holier than any other.* When the Norse chieftain Thorhadd the Old, who had been hofgoði at Mæri in Throndheim, went over to Iceland, he took down the temple beforehand and carried with him the hof-mold (mold or earth under the foundations of the temple) together with the sacred columns. He settled on Stöðvar-fjörð, on the eastern coast of Iceland, whither he transferred the sacredness of Mæri (Mærina helgi) to the whole Fjörð. He allowed no living being to be killed there, except the cattle that he required to be slaughtered for his household.†

It was not lawful to bear arms into the temples. When King Olaf Tryggvason went into the temple at Mæri, it is related that those of his men and the countrymen who followed him were unarmed; the king himself had only a gold-mounted staff or mace in his hand.‡ The Northman Hrafn had to give up to the Icelandic chieftain and hof-goði Ingemund a splendid sword in forfeiture, because he had, while absorbed in conversation with the chieftain, heedlessly entered with his sword in hand into the temple in Vatnsdal, which the latter presided over. "It is not the custom," said Ingemund to him, "to bear arms into the temple, and thou wilt be exposed to the wrath of the Gods if thou do not make atonement." It would be safest, he added, for Hrafn to give him the sword, and thus enable him to appease the wrath of the Gods.*

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* Eyrb. S. 4, 9, 10.

† Landnmb. IV. 6.

‡ Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. II. 167.

The temples were supported partly by the income of landed property which was bestowed upon them, and partly by the so-called temple-tax (hoftollr), a contribution which had to be paid by all who frequented a particular temple. Of the first-mentioned kind the so-called Uppsala-auðr (Upsala property), in Sweden, appears to have been. It was possessions belonging to the temple at Upsala, and its directors were the kings of that place.† Similar Temple-lands are spoken of in Iceland; for instance, it is related of the goði Jörund Hrafnsson, who erected a temple on his estate Svertingstad in the East Fjörðung of Iceland, that he appropriated to himself a large tract of unoccupied land and bestowed it on the temple.‡ The temple-tax or contribution was universal in Iceland, as in all probability it was also in Norway, and is similar to the Tithes, which in Christian times have been paid to the Church. The superintendent of the temple—hof-goði or hof-gyðia—received the contribution and made use of it together with the temple possessions, but in return had to take charge of the temple and keep it in repair.

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* Vatnsd. S. 16.

† Snor.: Yngl. S., 12; compare with Ol. Hel. S. 76.

‡ Landnmb. V. 3.

It may be assumed that many temples in Norway, even chief-temples, which were attended by the whole population of a Fylki or Province, were actually the private property of certain chieftains who had erected them in the first place and presided over them, and in whose family this supremacy or priesthood afterward became hereditary. It thus becomes explicable how such chieftains could have authority to tear down temples and take them along when they left the country, as we have above seen was the case both with the temple of Mæri in Throndheim, which appears to have been a Chief-Temple of the inhabitants of Inner-Throndheim, and with the temple on Moster.*

* Landnmb. IV., 6; Eyrb. S. 3.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DIVINE SERVICE OF THE HEATHENS.

SACRIFICES, or, in the old Norse language, blót, were considered by the heathen Northmen to be the most efficacious means of gaining favor with the Gods and averting their wrath. These offerings were usually bloody, and consisted in the killing or butchering of living creatures under the observance of certain solemn ceremonies; but the character of them is not more fully described in the ancient accounts. The animals most generally offered at the larger public sacrificial festivals were oxen, horses, sheep and swine. The victims were fattened beforehand, in order that they might attain a very large size and make a good appearance. They were slaughtered by the goði or Chief Director of the temple, and generally, as it appears, before the images of the Gods. The blood, which was called *laut*, was collected in a bowl called laut-bolli; the latter was usually of copper and had its place in the temple upon the High-Altar. By the aid of sprinkling-rods—the so-called laut-teinar—the altars and walls of the temple were besmeared (rjóða) with this *laut* or sacrificial blood, as it was also sprinkled (stökkva) over the multitude assembled at the sacrifice. The statues of the Gods, which, as before observed, were mostly of wood, were smeared with the fat of the victims, rubbed with cloth, and baked by the fires burning along the temple-floor. This function, we find, was performed by the women assembled at the festival.

The public sacrifices were in connection with solemn festivals (blótveizlur, *sing.* blótveizla, perhaps also gildi). In some places these were at the expense of the Chief Director of the temple, who in return had the use of the Temple-possessions, and received the Temple-tribute or hof-toll. This appears to have been universal in Iceland, where the temples were usually the private property of the goðar or priests. In other places, however, and it appears to have been universal in Norway, the expenses of the sacrificial feasts were defrayed by contributions from the people who attended a particular temple, who for that purpose brought ale and all kinds of provisions to the festival; though it also happened sometimes that some rich and powerful chieftain, who was at the same time superintendent of a temple, undertook alone to bear the expenses of a sacrificial banquet, in which case his liberality was, of course, highly praised. In Norway, it appears that after Harald Hárfagri's time the chief direction of all public sacrifices and the feasts connected with them devolved upon the king; he, therefore, occupied the high-seat at the sacrificial guilds, when he was present at them; otherwise some chieftain presided over them in his behalf. Sometimes the management of the sacrificial feasts of a Fylki or a larger district passed around by turns among a certain number (twelve) of the chosen men of the district; but this was perhaps an exception to the general custom, and was first adopted when the kings and their men had fallen off from the Asa-faith and embraced Christianity. The ancient custom in the time of the Fylki governments was, doubtless, thus: that the hersir, in the character of goði, conducted the public sacrificial feasts in his herað or district, or where several herað or even fylki joined together in a sacrifice, then all the hersar present acted, but in such a manner that the one in whose temple the feast was held presided. If a King or Jarl was present, the post of honor was, of course, always conceded to him; but they could hardly be called the actual conductors of sacrifices; at least, their Kingship or Jarlship originated in a higher than priestly dignity. Such was certainly the case in many places in Norway, as it is known to have been with the Upsala Kings in Sweden.

The sacrificial feast followed after the sacrifice. The flesh of the sacrificed animals, including that of the horses, was now boiled in large pots which hung over the fires along the temple-floor, and was afterwards devoured by the assembled guests, who, as at other banquets, sat along the side-walls of the house on both sides of the fire. The full drinking-horns (*full*) were now borne around or between the fires (of elda), probably as a kind of purification, and the conductor of the sacrifice consecrated (vigja) them, as well as all the sacrificial food (blót matr). They first drank Odin's horn—or those who trusted in their own strength and energy drank a horn to Thor—next Njörð's horn, and Frey's horn for prosperous seasons and for peace. Then many were accustomed to drink Bragi's horn, by which solemn vows were made; and finally, a horn to the memory of good kinsmen departed. All these solemn *toasts* were called *minni* or memorial horns, and were called out by the conductor of the sacrifice, who, in the ancient language was said "at mæla fyrir minni" "to call out the memorial toasts."

The public sacrifices thus consisted of two important performances: first, the butchering (högg, at höggva) and the blood-sprinkling (at rjóða, stökkva) connected with it, all which it seems took place during the first night of the festival; and secondly, the sacrificial feast, at which the consecrated horns were the principal affair, and during which the anointing of the idols appears to have been attended to.

Three times during the year they held great sacrificial festivals, at which the inhabitants of larger or smaller portions of the country assembled together at one common chief-temple. The first of these festivals was held on *Winter-night*, at the beginning of Gor-mánaðr, or, by our reckoning, about the middle of October,—the 14th of that month being still called Winter-night in Norway, and reckoned the beginning of winter. This festival was called "vetrnátta blót" or "blót ímóti vetri," *i. e.*, *Winter-night's Sacrifice*, or, *Sacrifice toward Winter;* and they were then said to welcome winter—(at fagna vetri). They sacrificed at that time for a *good year* (til árs), which in Norway meant in reality a good winter, that being then, as now, a matter of very great importance for that country.*

The second great sacrificial festival was held on *Mid-winter* (miðr vetr), *i. e.*, at the beginning of the þorra-mánaðr (Thor's month) of the ancients, or, according to our reckoning, in the middle of January. The 12th of January is still called Mitvet by the Northmen. This sacrifice was usually called miðsvetrar blót, *i. e.*, Midwinter's Sacrifice, or Jól, jólablot, *i. e.*, Yule; sometimes also þorra-blót, from the month in which it was solemnized. It began on *Midwinter-night* (miðsvetrar-nátt), which, by reason of the great sacrificial slaughter then performed, was named höggu-nátt, the Hewing or Butchering Night, and it lasted three days, or, according to the ancient mode of expression, three nights. It appears to have been the most solemn sacrificial festival of the Northmen, and they then sacrificed for Peace and a productive Season (til árs ok friðar). On Yule-eve it was the custom to lead out a boar consecrated to Frey, which was called the Atonement-Boar (sónar-göltr); upon this the persons present laid their hands and made solemn oaths (heitstrengingar). This circumstance, as well as the fact that the Yule-sacrifice was made for Peace and Fruitfulness, makes it highly probable that the festival was chiefly in honor of Frey.†

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* Snor.: Yngl. S. 8; Ib. Ol. Hel. S. 115.

† Concerning Yule (Jól) see Snorri: Ynglinga Saga, 8; Hák. Góð. Saga. 15 and 19; Olaf Hel. Saga, 114 and 115, and Ol

The third great sacrificial festival was held at the beginning of Summer, probably on Summer's-day, which, according to both the ancient and the modern Calendar of the Northmen, falls on the middle of April. This festival was called blót at sumri—*Sacrifice toward Summer*, or Sigr-blót—*Sacrifice for Victory*, a name which it received because they then sacrificed for victory and success in the military and Víking-expeditions which they might undertake in the approaching summer.* It is, therefore, probable that this festival was specially in honor of Odin.

Some have also supposed that a great sacrificial festival was held at Mid-summer-time,† but there is scarcely sufficient ground in the ancient sagas for this assumption. It is true that Snorri speaks in a single place of a miðsumars-blót, but this is evidently a confusion in the account, and it is properly a Mid-winter sacrifice, and not a Mid-summer one that is alluded to.

The heathen Northmen had many smaller sacrificial feasts, beside the three great ones above cited, but to pretend to decide upon the times when they

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Tryggv. Saga in Fornm. Sögur, 162, 165, 166; from which it appears that Yule and the Mid-winter Sacrifice were the same festival, and that the heathen Yule was held in January, therefore later than the Christian festival. Yule is doubtless the same festival that Procopius says the Thulites (Northmen) celebrated on the return of the sun, after it had been, at midwinter's time, forty days below the horizon. Proc. de Bell. Got. lib. II. cap. 15.

* Snor.: Yngl. S. 8, Ol. Hel. S. 115.

† Magnusen: *Specimen Calendarii Gentilis* in the 3d part of the Arna-Magnæan edition of the O. Edda, p. 1086, *et al.*

were held, leads only into a multiplicity of conjectures, which are wholly without foundation.*

Human sacrifices (manna-blót) were not unusual, although it was generally bondsmen and malefactors that were offered up. The sacrifice of human beings was performed either by butchering them like other victims, collecting the blood in the sacrificial bowls, and afterward sinking the corpse into a pool or morass; or by breaking the victim's back over a sharp rock; or finally by hurling it out over a precipice among the rocks of an abyss. Only on rare and very important occasions were the free-born sacrificed to the Gods; and yet there were instances when the victims were chieftains or their children. Thus it is related of the Upsala King Aun that he sacrificed his nine sons to Odin for the sake of prolonging his life.† King Olaf Trételgja of Vermaland was burned to death by his subjects, and sacrificed thus to Odin in order that a great famine should cease.‡ Of the zealous Asa-worshiper Hákon Jarl it is stated, that during the battle in Hjörunga bay with the Jomsvíkingar he sacrificed his son Erling, then seven years old, to Thorgerd Hörgabrúð, and caused his bondman Skopta Kark to kill the boy, in the manner which the Jarl himself prescribed.§

Among human sacrifices may also be reckoned the practice of "carving the Blood-eagle" (rísta blóðörn) upon captured enemies. It consisted in cutting the ribs from the spinal column and then through the open wound tearing out the lungs, which, it was said, they presented to Odin for victory.*

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* See Magnusen: *Spec. Cal. Gentilis.*

† Snor.; Yngl. S. 29.

‡ Ib. 47.

§ Jomsvík. S. 44, in Fornm. S. XI. p. 136.

The inhuman custom which the Norwegian Víkings in heathendom had, of throwing up small children into the air and catching them again upon their spear-points (henda börn á spjóta oddum),† is to be regarded perhaps not merely as an outburst of the most savage ferocity of rude warriors, but also as a kind of human sacrifice.

The conqueror usually regarded all enemies slain in battle as an offering he had made to Odin, and it appears to have been the custom sometimes, in order that the sacrifice should be still more special, to besmear the altars with the blood of the first chieftains among the slain.

Two kinds of bloody self-immolation are mentioned in the Sagas. The one is "to mark one's-self with the Spear-point" (at marka sik geirs-oddi), a custom by which the Asa worshiper, when dying of sickness, consecrated himself to Odin. The introduction of this custom is attributed to Odin himself,‡ but how far it came into general practice is not known. Probably it was intended to take the place of death by arms upon the battle-field, and thus open to the dying an admission into the ranks of the Einherjar. The other kind of self-immolation consisted in the custom by which any one, who had become old or weary of life, leaped headlong from a steep cliff and thus went hence to Odin. It is mentioned only in King Gautrek's Saga. It is there related that a family living in a retired place in West-Gothland had a steep and lofty cliff (called Ætternisstapi, *i. e.*, Family Rock) near their house, from the summit of which all the aged members of the family or those who had no prospect of supporting themselves, without becoming a burthen to the others, precipitated themselves. "Thus they died," it is stated, "without any kind of sickness, and went to Odin."* It is true that Gautrek's Saga is in the main a romance, yet there are a few very ancient and undoubtedly genuine traditions here and there interwoven in it, and among them is the above account, which should not be regarded as a mere fiction.

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* Ol. Tr. S. Skalh. I. 179; the O. Edda: Sigurðar-kviða Fafnisbana, II. 26; Ragn. Loðbr. S. 18; Norna Gests S. 6.

† Landnmb. V. 11; Friðþ. S. 11.

‡ Snor.: Yngl. S. 10.

There were human Offerings which were not attended with the death of the victim, at least, not immediately. This was when a person either gave himself, or was given by his parents—sometimes, even, before his birth—to one of the Gods, *i. e.*, was consecrated to the service of that God, perhaps as his hofgoði or priest. Thus it is related of the chieftain Guðbrand, from whom Gudbrandsdal received its name, that he was given to the Gods by his father Raum, and his original name Brand was, in consequence thereof, changed to Guðbrand.†

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* Gautreks S. 1–2 in Fornald. S. III.

† Fundinn Noreg. 1, in Fornald. S. II. p. 6.

Thorolf Mostrarskegg of Iceland, the zealous worshiper of Thor already spoken of, "gave his son Steinn (from his birth it appears) to Thor, his friend, and called him Thorstein." Of this Thorstein, it is related that when he had a son who at the heathen rite of sprinkling with water received the name of Grim, "he gave him to Thor, destined him to be a priest (hofgoði) and called him Thorgrim."* The Haleygian Chieftain Eyvind Kinnrifa, a contemporary of King Olaf Tryggvason, was given to Odin from his birth. When King Olaf had taken him prisoner and could neither with fair words nor with threats prevail on him to submit to be baptized, he at last caused a vessel of hot coals to be set upon Eyvind's stomach, in order that the dreadful torture might compel him. But Eyvind was even then inflexible. At length, when his body was bursted with the heat, he begged them to take off the vessel; he wished to say a few words before he died. The king asked again if he would believe in Christ. "No!" answered he, "I cannot receive baptism, even though I would. My father and mother had no children before they applied to the magic-skilled Finns. The latter told them that they should have a child, if they would promise under oath this child should serve Odin and Thor until the day of his death. They did as the Finns advised. I was born, and they gave me to Odin. So soon as I was able to judge for myself in anything, I renewed their vow. I have since that time, in all devotedness, served Odin, and I have become a mighty chieftain. Now I have been so many times given to Odin that I neither can nor will deceive him." With these words upon his lips Eyvind died.* When the Swedish King Eirik Sigrsæli (the Victorious) was on the eve of an important battle with his nephew Styrbjörn, and greatly feared the issue of the contest, he went in the night to Odin's temple and gave himself to the God in order to obtain the victory—though on condition that he should have ten years longer to live.† It is stated that this same King Eirik died ten years afterwards of sickness;‡ but in general it was certainly the belief of the heathen Northmen that they who were given or had given themselves to Odin must die a violent death, or at least be marked in their dying hour with the spear-point. The Leira-King Harald Hyldatand and King Vikarr of Hörðaland, both of whom had been given to Odin from their birth, ended their lives by a violent death; the former, as it appears, by Odin's own hand, the latter by a special arrangement of Odin's.

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* Eyrb. S. 7 and 11.

Besides by the sacrifice of living beings, it was believed that the favor of the Gods might also be gained by gifts (fórn) to temples and idols, as well as by prayers and the vows (heit) connected with them. Thus it is said of Hákon Jarl, when he wished to obtain for Sigmund Brestersson the protection of the Goddess Thorgerd Hörgabrúð, that he first cast himself down at the foot of her statue and lay there for a long time. He then arose and told Sigmund that he was to bring her an offering (fórn) of silver and lay it upon the footstool before her. But as the statue would not even then give the desired token of its good-will, the Jarl cast himself down before it again and then shed tears. Thereupon the statue gave the desired token by letting loose a gold ring which it bore upon its arm, and which the Jarl wished to take from it for Sigmund.* Before Thor's statue in a temple at Hundsthorp in Gudbrandsdal, the people placed every day four loaves of bread with the due proportion of meat, and they believed that the God consumed the food, when it was devoured by the vermin that found a retreat in the great hollow wooden statue.† When the heathen Icelander Hallfred Vandræðaskald wished to get quickly away from Norway, which Olaf Tryggvason was just then converting to Christianity, he and his seamen united in making vows to the Gods, in order to get a fair wind for any heathen country whatsoever, and they promised to give goods (fé) and three barrels of ale to Frey if they could get a fair wind for Sweden, or to Thor or Odin, if they came back to Iceland.‡ The purport of this gift we suppose to be, that there should be a banquet held at which they would drink the promised ale to the honor of the Gods they called upon. During a severe winter in Iceland, the people of Reykdal held a meeting at the house of the hofgoði Ljót, on the Thverá and unanimously agreed to make vows in order to obtain a better state of weather. Ljót thought they ought to promise gifts to the temple, and to let the new-born infants be exposed and kill off the old people. But Askell, a pious chieftain, raised objections to this proposition. It would be better, said he, for them to promise, in honor of the Creator, to give property to support the aged and bring up the children. Askell's humane counsel was also followed.* Prayers were for the most part connected with the sacrifices, and it was believed that they must be uttered with great precision and care, wherefore the people mostly confined themselves to certain formulas which were composed by the priests most deeply initiated into the mysteries of Religion.† When they wished to pray right zealously, they cast themselves down with the face upon the ground before the image of the God.

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* Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. 204.

† Styrbjörn. þáttr, 2, in Fornm. S. V. p. 250.

‡ Ol. Tr. S. in Fornm. S. I. p. 61.

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* Fareyinga S. 23.

† Snor.: Ol. Hel. S. 118–119.

‡ Ol. Tr. S. 154, in Fornm. S. p. 15.

Purifications were also among the sacred rites of the Northmen's worship, as we have seen in the above reference to the sacred Helgafell in Iceland, which no person could look upon before he had washed himself.‡ Not only water, but also fire, was esteemed a means of purification ; hence the custom, at the sacrificial feasts, of bearing the filled horns around or between the fires before they emptied them. Fire was regarded with veneration, and the people consecrated landed property and appropriated it to themselves by passing around it with burning fire, the ceremony being performed by walking or riding around the place against the sun (andsœlis), *i. e.*, from west to east, with a flaming brand*.

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* Vemundar S. 7, in Íslendinga Sögur II., p. 248.

† The O. Edda: Hávamál 145–146.

‡ Chap. XX.

Hænsnaþóris S. 10; Viga-Gl. S. 26; Landnmb. III. 6; V. 1, 3.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WORSHIP OF THE DEAD, AND OF NATURAL OBJECTS.

It was not merely the Æsir and the spiritual beings allied to them that the heathen Northmen made the object of their worship; we find they also placed confidence in departed human beings as well as animate or inanimate natural objects, and even worshiped them.

A few noble and virtuous men, who, during life, had effected much good in their circle, were sometimes worshiped after death as guardian spirits of the country or the region in which they had lived and labored for good. Thus King Olaf Guðröðsson of Vestfold, who dwelt at Gierstad, was worshiped after his death by his former subjects; they sacrificed upon his burial-mound and called him Geirstaða-álfr, or Geirstad's Spirit.* Of another Northman, Grim Kamban, the first settler who made a permanent residence on the Faroe Islands, it is likewise related that "after his death they sacrificed to him on account of the favor in which he stood."† It is related of the Swedes that at the time when Ansgarius proclaimed Christianity in Sweden, they increased the number of their Gods by admitting among them—in consequence, it was said, of a revelation from above—one of their departed Kings, Eirik, to whom they dedicated a temple and in whose service special priests were appointed.* These deified spirits of the Dead were doubtless mostly regarded as a kind of Land-guardians (Landvættir).

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* Þáttr af Olafi Geirstaða-álfi.

† Landnmb. I. 14.

An idolatry far more gross, according to our ideas, was practiced by a few, who worshiped and put their faith in natural objects, sometimes animate and sometimes inanimate.

We find it mentioned in a few places that living men were worshiped, an idolatry which the Christians considered the most abominable of all, but which was certainly of very rare occurrence.

Many traces, however, of the worship of animals are to be found.

The faith which some placed in horses, has been already alluded to.† This may be understood when we remember that the horse was beyond all doubt an animal sacred to Frey, and therefore may have been worshiped as the symbol of that God.

The worship of oxen and cows is likewise mentioned. The Norse chieftain Hárek, who lived in Olaf Tryggvason's time, and dwelt at Rein, was accused of secretly sacrificing to an unusually large and strong ox that he owned.‡ A certain King Eystein of Upsala, who lived about the time of Ragnar Lóðbrók and his sons, appears to have had great faith in a cow which was called Sibilia (the ever-bellowing?). To this cow, says the account, they sacrificed greatly, and no one could endure to hear her bellowing. Therefore, the King was accustomed to let her go in advance of his army, when he marched forth against his enemies.* It is related of the Norwegian Fylki-King Augvald, that he made special sacrifices to a cow which he took with him whithersoever he went, by sea or by land, and whose milk he esteemed as a medicine. When he died the cow was laid in a mound near his own.† Perhaps sacred cows were symbols of the mythic cow Auðhumla, although there are no traces of her worship to be found.

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* Rimbertus: Vita Ansgarii, cap. 23.

† Chap. XVII.

‡ þáttr þórst. Uxafóts, 13, in Fornm. S. III., p. 132.

Small metallic images of both horses and oxen are found in the heathen burial-mounds in Norway, and may without doubt be regarded as relics of the worship of these animals.

When the Norse chieftain Flóki Vilgerðarson was preparing to set out from Rógaland in search of Iceland, he set up a great sacrifice at Smörsund, and sacrificed to three ravens, or consecrated them by sacrifices, in order that they might show him the way. By their direction, it seems, he found the land he was seeking for.‡ Flóki's offering, it may be presumed, was actually to Odin, and for this the birds of Odin were to show him the way.

With regard to animal-worship aomng the heathen Northmen, it is by no means clear what significance they attached to it—whether they imagined a Deity in any manner incarnated in the animal—or whether they regarded it merely as sacred to a certain Deity—or finally, whether they imagined it by any magic spells to be endowed with supernatural powers. Without doubt, the worship of animals was most frequently regarded from one of the two last-mentioned points of view, and was usually in the nearest connection with the belief in sorcery.

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* Ragnar Lóðbr. S. 8.

† Snor.: Ol. Tr. S. 71; Ol. Tr. S. 197 in Fornm. S. II., p. 138.

‡ Landnmb. I. 2.

Of inanimate things we find Mounds, Stones, Groves, and Waterfalls mentioned as objects of worship with some individuals.

Sacrifices to Mounds cannot have been of very rare occurrence; for in the Christian Code of the "Older Gula-Thing Laws" they are expressly forbidden, along with sacrifices to heathen Gods and altars. In the somewhat fabulous Saga of Ketil Hæng, a mound of Good Seasons (Árhaugr, *i. e.*, Mound of Fruitfulness) is mentioned, to which the inhabitants of Gestrekaland (in Sweden) sacrificed, in order to obtain favorable seasons, and upon which the snow never lay.* No doubt such sacred mounds were the graves of men who had been deified after death, or else they were thought to be the dwelling-places of the Elves.†

The Icelandic settler Eyvind, son of Loðin Aungul of Halogaland, is said to have sacrificed to some stones, called Gunnsteinar, which marked the boundaries of his estate in Flateyjardal, in the north Fjórðung of Iceland.* The Icelander Thorstein Gullknapp had a stone in his sacrificial house, to which he sacrificed and before which he cast himself down upon the earth when he worshiped it.† Finally, it is stated that on the estate Gilja in Vatnsdal, in North-Iceland, a large stone was standing, to which the owner of the estate, Koðrán Eilífsson and his kinsfolk, offered up sacrifices; for they said that in it dwelt their Ár-maðr (Year-Man, the bestower of prosperous seasons or fruitfulness). Concerning this stone, the legend farther says, that it split asunder when it was sprinkled with holy-water by Bishop Friðrek, who had accompanied Koðrán's son, Thorvald Viðförla, from Germany to his native island, in order to preach Christianity there.‡ Some such Elf or Guardian Spirit as the one last named was always imagined to dwell in the adored stones.

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* Ketil Hængs S. 5 in Fornald. S. II.

† See Chap. XVIII.

The Northman Thorir Snepil, who settled in Fnjoskadal in the North-Fjórðung of Iceland, sacrificed to a grove in the vicinity, from which his estate was named.§

Of the Icelander Thorstein Rauðnef, who was a great sacrificer and was also far-sighted or clairvoyant, it is related, that he sacrificed to a waterfall (fos) near his house, into which he caused all remnants to be thrown. On the night of his death, it is further related, his whole flock of sheep, consisting of more than two thousand, leaped over the waterfall and were destroyed.* In many parts of Norway the belief is still prevalent that a being, which is universally called Fosse-Grim, has its abode in the waterfalls. This superstition is evidently a relic of the old heathen belief in a similar being, in which the worship of waterfalls may have originated.

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* Landnmb. III., 17.

† Hörðs S. 37.

‡ Kristni S. 2; compare with Ol. Tr. S. 131 in Fornm. S. I.

§ Landnmb. III. 17.

From all that is above quoted on the worship of inanimate objects among the heathen Northmen, we have every reason to presume that this idolatry was most intimately connected with the belief in Elves, and really originated in it.

* Landnmb. V. 5.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OATHS; DUELS AND BERSERKSGANG; ORDEALS OR JUDGMENTS OF THE GODS.

As the heathen Northmen considered Judicial Proceedings in the main to be closely connected with Religion, and, so to speak, under the direction of the Gods, from whom they imagined all Law and Justice originally proceeded—so did they also conceive that the Gods, especially in certain legal proceedings, more immediately made their appearance, either as witnesses or as judges. Of such proceedings the Oath and the Duel were the most important.

The Oath (eiðr) was regarded by the heathen Northmen as a most sacred act. The solemn Oath was administered in a temple or at the great Assemblies (þing). He who took the oath called upon one or more of the Æsir to witness, while he held in his hand the so-called Altar-ring (stalla-hringr,) which had been dipped beforehand in the blood of a sacrificed ox. This Altar-ring was to be of silver, or of gold when convenient, with the ends unjoined (mótlauss), and should weigh at least two ounces; there was to be one in every chief-temple, to have its place upon the high-altar (stallr); whence its name. When the temple-priest (hofgoði) who was also Ruler of the district (heraðs-höfðíngi), was present at the *Thing* or in the Assemblies where he had to appear as Judge of the Court, he wore the ring upon his arm in order to have it always at hand in the possible event of administering an oath. To swear such an oath was called "to take oath upon the Altar-ring" (vinna eið at stallahring), or "to take Temple-oath" (vinna hofseið).*

In two places in the ancient Sagas—in the Landnámabók and in Viga-Glum's Saga—we find a pretty full exposition of the administration of Oaths among the heathen Northmen.

In the former, speaking of the heathen laws of Iceland, it is said that "a ring of two ounces in weight, or larger, shall lie upon the altar (á stalla) in every chief-temple; this ring shall the priest bear upon his arm at all the assemblies of the people which he shall preside over (heya); and he shall beforehand dip it (rjóðra, properly, redden it) in the blood of the ox which he himself has sacrificed. Every man who may have a case to be tried before the Court (þurfti lögskil af hendi at leysa at dómi), shall first take oath upon this ring, and name for himself two or more witnesses: 'I call upon these men as witnesses,' he shall then say, 'That I take oath upon the ring (at ek vinna eið at baugi), lawful oath, so help me Frey and Njörð and the Almighty Ás (Odin), that I will so prosecute—or defend, or bear witness in, or judge—this cause in such manner as I know to be most just and true, and most consistent with the law, and that I will fulfill all lawful obligations (ok öll lögmæt skil af hendi leysa) concerning the cases which I may have to act upon, while I am in this Assembly.' "*

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* Eyrb. S. 4, 16, 44; Kjalnes. S. 2; Dropl. Son. S. 6; Landnmb. IV. 17; Viga-Gl. S. 25.

Viga-Glum's Saga relates how the Icelandic Chieftain Glum Eyjólfsson (Viga-Glum) took oath that he had not committed a murder of which he had been accused. He was sentenced to take the oath at three temples in Eyjafjörð, viz.: at Djúpadal, at Gnupafell, and at Thverá. "When he had come with his attendants," it is stated, "to the temple in Djúpadal, six men entered the temple with Glum. The man who was to administer the Temple-oath (vinna hofseið), took in his hand a silver ring, dipped (róðinn, *i. e.*, red-colored) in the blood of an ox that was sacrificed; and this ring did not weigh less than three ounces. Then Glum began to speak thus: 'I name Asgrim as a witness and Gizur as another witness that I take the Temple-oath on the ring, and declare before God, *i. e.*, Odin (at ek vinn hofseið at baugi ok segi ek þat Æsi, *i. e.*, Oðinn), that I was not present there, and did not commit murder there, and did not stain point and edge with blood there, where Thorvald Krók was killed (at ek vark-at þar, ok vák-at þar, ok rauðk-at þar odd ok egg, er þórvaldr Krókr fékk bana). Give heed now to the oath, ye who are wise men, and are here present!' " The form of this oath may serve at the same time as an example of the craftiness which was sometimes employed on such occasions; for Glum, who actually had committed the murder, from which he intended to clear himself on oath, had craftily arranged his words in so ambiguous a manner that, when critically examined, they contained a direct confession of the murder. The ambiguity which lies in the use of the particle *at*—which as a suffix in the Old-Norse signifies both *not* and *at*, or *present at*—cannot be expressed in the translation. The witnesses seemed to think the formula which Glum made use of to be rather unusual, but did not notice the trick until a more sagacious chieftain showed them, some time afterward, how they had been humbugged. Glum's murder case was again taken up by the Supreme Court (Al-þing), and to escape outlawry he had to give over the half of his estate to the son of the murdered man, as a penalty.*

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* Landnmb. IV. 7.

The former of the above-cited oath-formulas was doubtless used before the Courts of Justice of heathendom, not only in Iceland but also in Norway, from whence the inhabitants of that island brought it with them. Frey, Njörð, and Odin, who were probably meant by the term Almighty Ás, were therefore the Deities generally called to witness in Oaths; sometimes, however, the term Ás or Odin only was employed, as is seen in the second formula.

Out of Courts they made use of other oaths, as we find they swore by certain objects which were looked upon as holy, or as symbols of something holy. Such oaths are named in various places in the old Eddaic poems: for instance, by the Deck of the Ship, by the Margin of the Shield, by the Edge of the Sword, by the Lightning's light Water, *i. e.*, flash, by the southward declining Sun, *i. e.*, Mid-day Sun, and many such things. When Völund wishes to secure his bride, the daughter of King Niðað, against the molestations of her father, he exacts of the king an oath that he will not do her any harm:

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* Viga-Gl. S. 25.

"First shalt thou swear me
All the oaths:—
By the Ship's deck
And the Shield's margin,
By the Steed's neck
And the Sword's edge,—
That thou torment not
The wife of Völund,
Nor of my bride
Become the destroyer."*

Sigrún upbraids her brother Dag, for having broken his oath to her husband Helgi, in the following words:

"May all the oaths
Recoil upon thee,
Which thou hast sworn
To Helgi,—
By the light waters
Of Leiptur's stream,†

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* The O. Edda: Völundarkviða, 31.

† Leiptr—lightning—is one of the mythic streams mentioned in the Edda as flowing out from Hvergelmir, the great source of all streams. "Þaðan eiga vötn öll vega," "thence the streams all have their ways."

And by the cold stones
Beneath the sea."[*]

When Guðrún Gjúkadóttir reminds her husband Atli of the oaths he has broken toward her brother Gunnar, she says:

"So may it befall thee, Atli!
As thou held oaths
Oft sworn with Gunnar
And early given;—
By the Sun southward bearing,
By Sigtyr's[†] strong mountain,
By the sanctity of the couch
And by Ullur's ring."[‡]

How the expressions occurring in these formulas were to be taken, whether literally or figuratively, it is now impossible to determine.

Sometimes, also, there occurs a formula by which the swearer wishes himself in the power of evil beings, or that misfortune may strike him, if he swear falsely. Thus it is said of King Atli's messenger Vingi:

"Then swore Vingi
Himself little sparing:
Might the Jötuns take him
If on oath he lied,
And the gallows his body
If he the peace disturbed."[§]

Duelling was known among the heathen Northmen by two names: hólmgánga and einvígi, terms which were sometimes distinguished, but which were more frequently used indiscriminately.

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[*] The O. Edda: Helgakv. Hundb. II., 29.
[†] Sigtyr, the God of Victory, a name of Odin.
[‡] The O. Edda: Atlakv. 30.
[§] The O. Edda; Alamál 31.

The hólmgang was so named because it originally took place on an islet or hólm, where the combatants could be more undisturbed and less liable to be interfered with by others, who might venture to mingle in their quarrel, or separate them against their will; and where the field of battle might have natural boundaries beyond which neither of the parties could possibly retreat. Other artificially-inclosed battle-grounds afterwards took the place of the hólms, but they still retained the name, and when possible, were laid out upon a small island. The hólmgang took place after a preliminary challenge (at skora á hólm; at skora á til hólmgöngu), at which the time and place were fixed, and at the same time the challenger declared his antagonist, should he not accept the challenge, to be every man's Nithing, *i. e.*, a man whom every one might scoff with impunity.

The usages of the hólmgang are variously described; no doubt they varied in minor essentials at different periods, and were probably dependent, in many particulars, upon the choice of the combatants, especially of the challenger. A few of the more detailed accounts of such duels, according to the Sagas, shall here be given.

The Icelander Egil Skallagrimsson, while on a journey through Norway in the time of Hákon Aðalsteinsfostri, came to the estate of Blindheim on the island Hauð, where a young parish overseer, Friðgeir, dwelt with his mother Gyða. He found a friendly reception with them and stayed in Blindheim several days. During this time he noticed that a great affliction rested upon the whole household, but especially upon Friðgeir's sister; yet it was not until he was on the eve of departure that Gyða revealed to him the cause of this sadness. A man with the name of Ljót the Pale, a universally-hated Berserk and duellist (hólmgaungu-maðr), had sued for the daughter, and having been rejected, he had challenged Friðgeir to a hólmgang. On the following day they were to meet (ganga á hólm) on the island Vorl, and Gyða now begged of Egil, who was an expert swordsman, that he would accompany her son thither. Egil promised to do so, and remained that day at Blindheim. "In the evening came the friends of Friðgeir who had resolved to bear him company; there were many men assembled during the night, and a great banquet. But on the day after, Friðgeir made ready for the journey, and many men with him; Egil was in his train. It was good weather for traveling. They set off and arrived at the island. At the place of meeting there was a broad embankment stretching along at a short distance from the sea; upon this the hólm-stead was marked off, with stones laid in a circle round about it. Now Ljót came along with his folk and made ready for battle; he had both sword and shield. Ljót was a very large and strong man, and as he was walking forth along the embankment to the place of combat, the Berserksgang came suddenly upon him; he began to yell horribly and bite his shield. Friðgeir was not large; he was slen and of beautiful countenance, but not strong; neither had he at any time taken part in a fight. When Egil saw Ljót, he sung a verse in which he said that the battle would not go off well for Friðgeir; he himself would meet the terrible champion who, biting in his shield's edge, called upon the Gods.* Ljót saw Egil and heard his words. 'Come up hither to the hólm, thou great man!' said he, 'and fight with me, if thou hast such a great desire to do so. That will be much better than for me to fight with Friðgeir; for I shall not add to my glory by laying him upon the ground.' Egil answered in a verse that he accepted the challenge. Thereupon Egil made ready for a hólmgang with Ljót. He had the shield which he was wont to bear, and in his belt was the sword which he called Naðra (Viper); Dragvandil—the sword he generally used—he had in his hand. He went in over the marks which bounded the place of combat; but Ljót was not yet ready. Egil brandished his sword and sung a verse in which he threatened his antagonist. Then comes Ljót forth upon the battle ground and pronounces the hólmgang laws, 'that he shall forever bear the name of Níthing who retreats beyond the boundary stones which are set up in a ring around the hólmgang.' Then they ran in upon each other, and Egil hewed at Ljót, but the latter warded off with his shield. Egil struck now one blow after another, so that Ljót could not make a single stroke in defense. He moved backward in order to get sword-room; but Egil was just as quickly after him and was not sparing in his blows. In this manner Ljót passed out over the boundary stones and far along the embankment. Thus the first round was ended and Ljót demanded rest. Egil let it be so; they stood still and rested a while. It was a law of the hólmgang, at that time, that when one party demanded anything of the other and conquered, he should have as reward of victory (sigrmál), whatever he had demanded; but should he be overcome, he was to acquit himself with so much property as might be agreed upon; and if he fell on the hólm, then all his possessions were forfeited, and the one who slew him was to inherit after him. Egil now caused Ljót to make ready: 'I wish we may now put an end to this hólmgang!' Ljót sprang hastily up. Egil ran up to him, hewed at him straightway, and came so near his life that he gave way and exposed himself, for his shield slipped from him. Then Egil hewed at Ljót; the blow struck him above the knee and took off his foot. Ljót fell and died immediately. His death was but little mourned, for he had been a most turbulent man. He was a Swede by birth, and had no kinsmen in Norway. He had come thither and had accumulated property by hólmgang, as he had slain many good citizens to whom he had given the choice between hólmgang and a relinquishment of their lands and allodial possessions. He had in this manner become very wealthy, both in lands and movables."*

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* The magic songs which were to protect the champion in battle, were sung under the shield, by setting the mouth to its edge, perhaps to make the sound louder. *See* O. Edda: Hávamál, 157.

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* Egil's S. 67.

Egil Skallagrimsson had at the same time an inheritance to claim in Norway, which a certain Atli the Short held in possession by an unjust decree of King Eirik Blood-axe. As Eirik was now banished from the country, Egil thought that he might perhaps be able to establish his claims; he accordingly repaired to Ask, the residence of Atli, on Fenring island near Hörðaland, in order to claim his inheritance. Atli refused to pay up, but accepted Egil's summons to appear at the *Gula Thing* to have the case decided. They both accordingly made their appearance at the *Thing*. Egil claimed his inheritance before the Tribunal; but Atli proffered Tylftar-eið, or the Oath of twelve men, that he had no property whatever in his care, belonging to Egil. "When Atli came before the court (dómr) with the men who were to take oath for him, Egil appeared against him and said that he would not accept Atli's oaths for his (Egil's) property. 'I will offer thee another law, this, namely, that we shall go to hólm here at the *Thing*, and he who conquers shall have this property.' This proposition of Egil's was according to law and ancient usage, *i. e.*, that every man had the right to challenge another to a hólmgang, either in prosecution or defense of his cause. Atli said he would not object to a hólmgang with Egil. They then took each other by the hand and came to a mutual agreement that they would fight (gánga á hólm), and that the victor should take possession of the disputed lands. Thereupon they armed themselves for the hólmgang. Egil went forth with helmet upon his head, a shield before him and a spear (kesja) in hand; but the sword Dragvandil he had firmly secured in his right hand. It was a custom of the hólmgang-men to equip themselves so that they had no occasion to draw their swords upon the hólm, but could have the sword in hand always ready for use. Atli was armed in the same manner. He was accustomed to the hólmgang, and was besides a strong man and very bold. A large and old ox was then led forth; this was called blótnaut, *i. e.*, Ox of Sacrifice, and the victor was to kill it (höggva). Sometimes there was one ox, sometimes each of the combatants led out his own. When they were equipped and all was ready, they rushed forth upon each other and first threw their spears, but neither of them pierced the shield; they were both left sticking in the ground. They then seized their swords; they closed in upon each other and exchanged blows. They hewed thick and heavy, and soon the shields became useless. As Atli's shield became much injured, he cast it away, seized his sword with both hands and hewed briskly. Egil struck him over the shoulders, but the sword did not cut; he gave the second and the third stroke, and it was easy for him to get a stroke at Atli; for Atli had not any defense. But although Egil swung his sword with might and main, still it did not cut, with all that he hewed. Egil now saw that all this was of no use, for his own shield was beginning to give way. So he let go sword and shield, ran in upon Atli and seized him with his hands. Now all could see which of them was strongest. Atli was thrown upon his back; but

Egil cast himself fiercely down upon him and bit his throat asunder. Thus did Atli give up his life. Egil sprang up immediately and rushed to the place where the sacrificial ox was standing, seized with one hand the chops, and with the other the horn, and wrested it around so violently that the feet of the animal came up into the air and its neck was broken. Then Egil took possession of all the lands about which the quarrel had been."*

It appears, however, that the hólmgang was mostly attended with a great many more circumstances than those above described.

The Icelandic Skald Kormak Ögmundsson, was embittered against his fellow-countryman Bersi—commonly called Hólmgang-Bersi—because the latter had married Steingerða, a woman whom Kormak loved. He therefore challenged Bersi to a hólmgang in a fortnight upon Leiðholm. When the appointed time was come they rode to the place of meeting, each with fifteen men. Many others had also assembled to see the fight. "Now they took a *felld* (a kind of large cloak) and spread out under the feet of Kormak and Bersi. Bersi said, 'Thou hast challenged me to a hólmgang, Kormak! but I offer thee single combat (einvígi). Thou art a young and inexperienced man; the hólmgang is attended with difficulties, but the single combat is by no means!' Kormak said, 'I do not fight better in single combat; I will try the hólmgang, and in everything measure myself with thee.' 'Have thy own way then!' said Bersi. It was a law of the hólmgang (hólmgöngu-lög) that the felld should be five ells between the skirts, with holes in the corners; in these holes they were to set wooden pins (hælar) with heads upon them, called tjösnur. The man who made the preparations was to go to the tjösnur in such a manner that he could see the sky between his legs, and to hold his ear-lobes while he repeated a prayer (formáli)—which was afterwards adopted in the sacrificial ceremony called tjösnu-blót. There should be three terraces (reitar) made around the felld, each a foot broad, and outside of them, four stakes. These were called höslur (hesli-stengur, hazel stakes), and the arena was said to be *hazelled* (þar er völlr haslaðr) when thus prepared. Each combatant shall have three shields, and when these are worn out they shall step in upon the felld, in case they have pressed off from it before. After this they shall defend themselves with their (offensive) weapons only. He who has been challenged shall have the first stroke. Should either be wounded so that blood falls upon the felld, then there is no obligation to fight longer. Should either step with one foot beyond the höslur, in technical language he *gives way* (ferr han á hæl, *lit.* takes to his heels), but if with both, he *flies* (rennr). A man shall hold a shield before each of the combatants. He who is most severely wounded shall pay as hólm-fine (hólmlausn) three marks of silver. Thorgils held the shield for his brother Kormak, and Thord Arndisson for Bersi. Bersi struck first and clove Kormak's shield; the latter repaid Bersi in the same manner, and thus they hewed three shields to pieces for each other. Then it was Kormak's turn to strike. He struck at Bersi, but the latter defended himself with his sword Hvíting. Sköfnung (Kormak's sword) took off the point of Hvíting, but the point sprung against Kormak's hand and wounded him slightly on the thumb, so that the joint opened and let blood fall upon the felld. Thereupon the seconds stepped in between and would not allow them to fight longer. Then said Kormak, 'This is a trifling victory that Bersi has gained by my mishap, though we be now separated.' Bersi demanded the hólm-fine, and Kormak promised that it should be paid."*

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* Egil's S. 68.

It is easily seen in the foregoing descriptions, that there was a great difference in the hólmgangs, the two first-mentioned being quite simple, and the latter one being attended with more difficulties. We see also in the latter that there was a distinction made between the einvígi and the hólmgánga, and that it was the duels of the latter sort that were attended with such complicated difficulties.

The Einvígi being the simplest, was probably also the oldest form of single combat. It was gradually made more and more complicated, so that the combatants might have better opportunities for displaying their strength and skill. The duel, however, appears to have been always called Hólmgánga, when it was resorted to for justice, whether it was of the simpler or more complex kind. Therefore, the two forementioned hólmgangs, taken from Egil's

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* Kormaks S. 9–10.

Saga, may be considered to approach more nearly the einvígi.

The peculiarities of the einvígi, in its more limited sense, were doubtless these: that the space allotted to the combatants for action was not so limited, that they had liberty to use more kinds of weapons than the sword alone, and that they held their own shields. But the peculiarities of the complicated hólmgang were: that the combat should take place upon a Felld or a kind of mantle, that the combatants were allowed to use three shields apiece, and in general did not themselves bear them, but each one had one of his friends to hold the shield before him, who was thence called his Shield-bearer (skjaldsveinn), that they fought with swords only and those of a certain length, and that they regularly exchanged blows.

Both kinds of duel, when resorted to for justice, were regulated by certain laws, which were recited by the challenger before the fight began; both conveyed the right of the challenged to strike the first blow, and to appoint a man in his stead, if he himself should feel any hesitation to meet his antagonist; both were accompanied with the sacrifice of one or two oxen, which the victor butchered; and finally, the hólm-fine or ransom of the vanquished for a certain sum fixed beforehand (three marks of silver, or more), appears to have been common to both. Sometimes the challenger, when the duel was to decide the possession of property, in order to show his disinterestedness, would stake as much value in money as was risked by the party against whom he made his claims.

It may, doubtless, be considered to have been a departure from the usual custom when sometimes each of the combatants stood upon his own *felld*, beyond which he was not to move so much as a finger's breadth; or when one fought against several, one after the other, in the same engagement.

Another kind of hólmgang, or duel, was the so-called kergánga, in which the contending parties were inclosed in a covered tub or vessel, and there in the dark exchanged cuts or thrusts, while they fended with batons which they held in one hand. This combat is only found described in a single place in the Sagas, and may, therefore, be regarded as having been of rare occurrence. The account is as follows:

"When the Icelander Thorgils, called Orrabein's Step-son, came on mercantile business to Upland in Sviðþjóð (Sweden), he remained during the winter with a rich countryman named Thrand, who had a daughter Sigrid. To her a certain Randvid, an evil-disposed fellow, but a great warrior, had paid his addresses. Thrand refused his consent to the marriage. Thereupon Randvid challenged Thrand to a kind of hólmgang called kergánga, in which the parties shall fight in a covered vessel, having each a club in his hand. Thrand would rather fight than give his daughter to so wicked a man. Then said Thorgils to him, 'Thou hast entertained me hospitably, I will reward thee accordingly; I will fight with Randvid in thy stead.' Thrand accepted his offer. Thrand had the sword Jarðhúsnaut (a sword which he had found in a subterranean passage); Randvid had a very slender baton, an ell in length, in his hand. When all was ready, the tub was covered. Randvid told Thorgils to thrust the first, for he was the challenged. He did so, struck the baton so that it broke in pieces, and wounded Randvid in the abdomen. The latter then said, 'Give me now the sword, but do thou have the baton, then shall I stab thee with the sword.' 'Methinks now,' said Thorgils, 'that there is not any baton.' Soon afterward Randvid died. He had relied upon his sorcery; for he had killed many a man in this kind of Hólmgang."*

The Kergánga has something in common with the *Belt-clasping* (Beltespænden), still common in modern times among the peasants in some of the mountain districts of Norway, in which the two contending parties are inclosed within a large belt constructed for that purpose, and thrust at each other with large pocket-knives. Of this kind of duel there are scarcely any traces to be found in the ancient Sagas.

There were men in heathen times, as has been already alluded to in the above-quoted accounts, who made the holmgang a means of gaining a subsistence, and even a source of wealth; such were especially the so-called Berserks (Berserkr, *plur.* Berserkir), of whom it may be proper here to speak more at length.

The name of Berserkir was given to certain men who sometimes, especially in the heat of battle, were carried away by a wild frenzy which for the moment redoubled their strength and rendered them insensible to bodily pain, but at the same time deadened all humanity and reason in them, and made them like furious wild-beasts. In this condition, according to the ancient descriptions, they distorted their countenances hideously and changed color, now pale, now blue, and the hair stood up on their heads; they raved like dogs or wolves, and were as strong as bears or bulls; they howled like wild-beasts, bit the edge of their shields, and hewed down everything that met them, often without distinguishing between friend and foe, not even sparing their own children or nearest kindred, if these happened to come in their way. Neither fire nor steel, it was believed, could then take effect on them; with terror people saw them wade through fire or cast themselves upon naked weapons as if in pastime. In battle they went forth unharnessed, clad in the bare *serk* or shirt, whence probably their name was derived. This mad fury of theirs was called Berserksgang, and seems to have been regarded by the zealous Asa-worshipers as an inspiration from the War-God Odin. The Berserksgang, however, not only made its appearance in time of battle, but often also during severe labors, when the men who were transported by it accomplished things which otherwise seemed impracticable for human power. It was mostly called forth when the passion of the Berserk, and more especially his anger, was awakened. When the Berserksgang had spent its fury, there followed a great stupor and weakness, which often lasted many days.

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* Flóamanna S. 14.

In some, who in other respects were peaceable men, the Berserksgang was an actual disease, that came upon them at certain times without any known cause. It is said to have begun with a trembling, a chattering of the teeth, and a coldness of the body, followed by a great heat, which finally passed over into a perfect frenzy, during which the patient showed no mercy to anything whatever that came near him. When the disease left him, he again became as peaceable as before. Thus it is said of of the Icelander Thrymketill "that there was a great defect in his mind, and some looked upon it as a disease. It came over him every fortnight; a trembling seized upon his body so that every tooth in his head chattered, although his friends sought for him every alleviation possible. After this trembling and coldness followed a great heat; he then spared nothing about him, neither wall, stick, staff, nor man; even if there was a fire in his way he would go right through it. He tore off the table-covers and the door-casings from the house, whenever he could get at them. But when the frenzy left him he was again gentle and peaceable."* It is no wonder that in such cases the Berserksgang was considered a great defect; we find even that those who were possessed by it made vows to the Gods for the sake of being delivered from the plague.

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* Dropl. Son. S. 3.

The Berserks had another name given them by our forefathers, viz.: hamramir menn, and their madness was *at hamast.* These expressions denote the idea of the ancients concerning the nature of the Berserksgang. The Old-Norse word *hamr* signifies external form, disguise or semblance. Sometimes it was also used to denote the animal-fylgia or attendant spirit, which was believed to accompany every human being invisibly, as a kind of inferior guardian spirit.* The animal-fylgia (dýr-fylgja), as before said, expressed, in a certain manner, the character of the person whom it attended. Cruel, passionate men were thus believed to have ferocious wild-beasts as their fylgias. When their passion overpowered them to such a degree that it made them raving and deprived them of the use of reason, it was believed that the beast stepped up in the place of the man, that it entered the outward form of the man but acted with its own peculiar strength and unruliness. It was, therefore, said of one thus possessed by the Berserksgang, that he was not single or one-formed (ekki einhamr), *i. e.*, that another, stronger being acted in his human form. The superstition in this matter sometimes went even so far that they believed the man, in the moment of madness, to assume the outward form of the animal, as well as its internal nature and its strength.

Warlike chieftains endeavored to attract the Berserks to their armies, in order to render themselves so much the more irresistible and the more terrible to their enemies. Thus Harald Hárfagri is said to have had Berserks in his service, which were called *Wolf-hides* (úlfheðnar), because they wore wolf-skins over their armor. Their station was in the prow of the King's ship, as it was most exposed, in time of battle, to the attacks of the enemy. The Berserks could in this way become useful to those chieftains who had men enough to keep them in check when the Berserksgang came over them untimely. But to the masses the Berserks were a terror, and they availed themselves of the fear which they inspired—and which they naturally strove to augment by strengthening the superstition of their invulnerability—in order to bring into their power whatever they might wish to gain from the weaker. A challenge to hólmgang, for instance, was ever ready on the part of the Berserk when his shameless demands of property or of women were repulsed, and his wild frenzy, joined to his skill in the accomplishments requisite in a duel, secured to him in most cases a favorable issue of the battle. Those who in this way made of the hólmgang a means of gain, were usually called hólmgang-men (hólmgöngu-menn); their number was not inconsiderable in heathen times, and they were a real plague to the peaceable countrymen, whom they took pleasure in tormenting on all occasions.

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* Chap. 18.

Although the hólmgang degenerated in this manner into a tool of the basest selfishness, revenge, and wickedness, there is, at the same, time no doubt that it was originally a religious custom, in which the fundamental idea was, that the Gods would make manifest by the issue of the battle which of the contending parties had justice on his side. Therefore it was, even after its religious significance had become a matter of secondary importance, frequently attended with sacrifices, prayers, and other religious performances. The hólmgang was thus in effect a judgment of the Gods, intimately connected with the Asa-faith, and among the Northmen it disappeared with that faith, at least as a judicial act, although among many kindred nations, especially among the Germans, the duel passed over from the heathen into the Christian code. In Norway it was the Christian Jarls Eirik and Sveinn Hákonssons who abolished the hólmgang while Christianity was yet far from being generally introduced into the country (A. D. 1000–1014), while they at the same time established the penalty of outlawry against the hólmgang-men and Berserks who aggrieved the citizens.* In Iceland, where Christianity became the established religion by a decree of the people in the *Al-Thing*, A. D. 1000, the hólmgang was soon afterward abolished by the popular voice, in consequence of a duel of this kind between two Icelandic youths of distinction, the skalds Gunnlaug Ormstúnga and Skáld-Rafn. The issue of the battle between them being indecisive, and the combatants wishing to renew it, their influential kinsmen interfered and obtained the prohibition of all hólmgangs by law.†

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* Grettis S. 21.

† Gunnlaugs Ormstúnga S. 11.

Another judicial proceeding of the heathen Northmen, which was regarded still more expressly as a judgment of the Gods, though it is much less frequently mentioned that the hólmgang, was the custom of going under a strip of earth (ganga undir jarðarmen) in order to clear one's-self from accusations, to prove the justice of his claims or the truth of his assertions. This custom is called skírsla in the Old-Norse—a name which signifies a purification or setting free from accusations, and which was probably common to all similar customs. We find a description of it in the Laxdæla Saga. "It was a mode of setting one's-self free from accusations in those times, for him to go under a strip of earth (þat var skírsla at ganga skyldi undir jarðarmen)—a strip of green-sward being thrown up in such a manner that the ends only rested upon the ground, while he who was to clear himself from unfounded accusations (sá maðr er skírsluna skyldi fram flytja) had to pass under it. The heathens considered it no less a case of conscience, when they had to pass through this ceremony, than the Christians now esteem it when similar modes of purification (skírslur) are applied—as for instance, the ordeal of hot-iron (járnburðr). He who passed under the strip of earth was acquitted if the turf did not fall upon him." The narration in the above-mentioned Saga, shows also how much the heathens feared to submit to this means of deliverance when they were not quite certain themselves of the justice of their cause. The account is as follows:—A certain Icelander of distinction, Thorstein Surt, being by an unlucky accident drowned, with his family, the question arose how his inheritance should be divided among his relatives. A certain Thorkel Trefill, whose wife Gudrid was a near relative of Thorstein, and had besides a sister among the drowned, wished to get the whole inheritance. He therefore bribed the only survivor of the shipwreck, a certain Gudmund, to declare that the persons drowned had died in such an order that Gudrid's sister, who died last, became the heir of all the rest. Then after her death the whole inheritance should fall to Gudrid. But Gudmund had related the circumstances differently before he had been bribed by Thorkel, and this being rumored abroad, awakened some doubt in the minds of the other heirs, as to the legality of Thorkel's claim. They therefore demanded that Gudmund should be subjected to the above-mentioned test in order to confirm the truth of his later assertion. The test was accordingly decided upon. But as Thorkel was conscious that the whole affair did not hang rightly together, and consequently feared an unfavorable issue of the test, he persuaded two men to make a pretense of falling out in a quarrel at the moment that Gudmund was creeping under the turf, and to throw each other across it in such a way that the bystanders could plainly see that it fell by their fault. The plan was carried out successfully. Just as Gudmund had come under the strip of green-turf the preconcerted quarrel began, and both the combatants fell over the turf, which naturally tumbled down upon Gudmund. Thorkel now called upon the bystanders to give their opinion of the test, and they, being mostly his friends, declared with one voice that it would have turned out favorable if it had not been disturbed. It was decided accordingly and Thorkel took possession of the inheritance.*

This ceremony was sometimes accompanied with the taking of oaths, as was the case, for instance, when two or more persons swore fellowship (fóstbræðra-lag) with each other. On this occasion they sometimes passed under three such strips of turf.† This ceremony was also employed as a symbol of humility, in which case the first strip was to be raised as high as the shoulders, the second should reach the hips, the third as high as the middle of the thighs.

Another kind of heathen ordeal may here be mentioned in conclusion, which is spoken of in a few places in the ancient Eddaic poems, namely, the ceremony of clearing one's-self from an accusation by taking up stones out of a boiling cauldron with the bare hand, without injuring the hand. It is related of King Atli's Queen, Guðrún, that when she was accused of illicit intercourse with one King Thjodrek, a guest at Atli's court, she desired to prove her innocence by the means here spoken of. The ordeal was performed with great solemnities. The seething cauldron was consecrated by a certain King who was skilled in such things, who had been sent for on the occasion, and seven hundred of King Atli's men were present in the hall where the ordeal took place. Guðrún took up the stones from the bottom of the boiling cauldron with unscathed hand, and was acquitted. But Herkja, Atli's mistress who had accused the Queen, burned her hand when she was subjected to the same ordeal, and in punishment for her falsehood was cast into a pool and drowned.*

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* Laxd. S. 18.

† Fostbr. S. 1.

This whole affair, however, if indeed there be anything historical in the account, took place among the German tribes. The ordeal may therefore have been in use among them in heathen times, and through them become known to the Northmen, without having been employed by them. Not until Christian times do we find with certainty that the Northmen adopted this ordeal (ketilfang, or ketiltak),† which among the Germans was, like many similar customs, carried over from heathendom to Christianity.

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* The O. Edda: Guðrúnarkv. III.

† Eiðsiva Thing's Chr. Laws, 42 & Norw. Anc. Laws, I., p. 389, &c.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SORCERY.

THE belief in sorcery (fjölkyngi, görningar)* was universal among the heathen Northmen, and it had its origin in the doctrine itself, which represents the magic arts as an invention of the Asa-Gods.

They made a distinction between two kinds of magic, viz., galldr and seiðr.

The name galldr may be derived from gala, to sing, and thus denoted a kind of sorcery that was performed by magic songs (gala or kveða galldra). Its origin and dissemination was attributed to the Æsir, and especially to Odin, who therefore was also called galldrs föður—the father of magic incantations. The men who cultivated this art were called galldra-smiðir or galldra-menn. The Runes occupied in this kind of sorcery an important place as magic characters, and it appears that the magician, while singing his incantations, mostly marked or scored certain runic characters corresponding to the effects which were desired from his sorcery. Often the magic songs or incantations themselves were called runes (rúnar). It was believed that by such incantations they could protect themselves against arms, undo chains, heal wounds and cure diseases, extinguish fire and settle storms, gain woman's love and wake up the dead in order to learn of them the future.* In the Older Edda there are several poems which allude to these things, though often in a manner rather obscure to us, and they even contain powerful incantations of this kind, as well as instructions concerning the magic use of Runes; for instance, in the Rúnatals-þáttr Oðins (Odin's Runic Lay) which forms the conclusion of the Hávamál (Sublime Discourse), Gróugalldr (Groa's Incantation), Sigrdrífumál (Sigurdrifa's Song), &c. In the latter especially there is reckoned up a whole lot of magic runes, such as runes of Victory (sigrrúnar) to be cut upon the sword for victory; Ale-runes (ölrúnar) to be carved upon the drinking horn, or marked upon the back of the hand and on the nails, in order to gain woman's love; Safety or Protection runes (bjargrúnar) to be marked inside of the hand of those who render assistance at the birth of children; Surf-runes (brimrúnar) to be carved upon the ship's prow and rudder as a protection against the raging of the sea; Limb-runes (limrúnar) to be made on bark or wood to insure a speedy and favorable cure; Speech-runes (málrúnar), which were to confer eloquence at the assemblies; Sense-runes (hugrúnar) which were to give understanding. The poem clearly shows that these runes denoted incantations by means of magic songs and the inscribing of magic characters. A story from Egil's Saga may show what great faith the people had in the power of these formulas and magic signs. Queen Gunhilda wished to do harm to Egil at a banquet, and for this purpose caused poisoned ale to be offered to him. But Egil, who was suspicious of the drink, scored runes upon the horn, then pricked the inside of his hand with his knife and marked the runes with blood, whereupon the horn bursted and the drink fell on the floor.* It was, however, necessary to be very careful in the application of these magic spells, for in the hands of a bungler who knew not how to apply them properly, it was thought they might become very dangerous. This appears in another place in the same Saga. When Egil was on a journey in Norway, it is there related, he met with a countryman's daughter who was lying very sick. Her parents said they had applied to a country lad of the neighborhood for help, and he had carved runes in order to cure her, but she had only become worse with them. Egil examined the bed in which she lay, and found under the head a piece of whalebone with runes engraved upon it. He read them and found that they were incorrect. He scraped them off, burned the scrapings in the fire and engraved new runes, which he laid under her pillow. Immediately the girl awoke as if from a sleep, and recovered her health.* A knowledge of incantations and runes was not, as a general thing in heathen times, held to be in any way ignoble, when not applied to ignoble objects.

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* Fjölkyngi and fjölkunnigr—from fjöld, a multitude, fjöl, much, many (*Germ.* viel), and kunna, to be able, to know—signify multifarious knowledge, and much-knowing, and hence, magic, skilled in magic. Görningar (*sing.* görningr) from göra, to do, to make, properly denotes actions, performances; whence, magic arts; witchcraft.

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* These incantations were called valgalldr, probably because they were chiefly used in calling up those fallen in battle (valr).

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* Eg. S. 44.

The term seiðr, sometimes written seyðr, appears to be cognate with sjóða, to seethe, to boil, and in this case would signify witchcraft, or sorcery which was performed by the boiling of certain objects to which superstition had imputed magic powers. What these things were, is now no longer known; this was very naturally a secret of the initiated. In the performance of witchcraft (at síða, efla seið) there were a great many circumstances to be attended to. It was mostly done at night, and those who practiced it sat during the magic performances upon a raised platform called the witches' seat (seiðhjallr). The performance was also connected with a magic song or incantation, and the melody of this song was beautiful to hear. In the Laxdæla Saga a magic performance of this kind is described. The Icelandic chieftain Hrút Herjúlfsson was on unfriendly terms with his kinsman Thorleik Höskuldsson. The latter wished to do some injury to Hrút, and for that purpose employed his hireling Kotkel and Grima his wife, both of whom were well skilled in magic. "Kotkel and Grima went in the night to Hrút's house and established a great seiðr. When the enchanting song (seiðlætin) began, the people in the house could not imagine what it meant; but the song was beautiful to hear. Hrút alone knew the song; he forbade every one to look out of the house during the night, and bade all to keep awake as well as they could, then no one could be harmed by it. Nevertheless they all slept; Hrút remained awake the longest, but he, too, fell asleep at last. Hrút's son Kári, who was then twelve years old, was the most promising of his children and well beloved by the father. The sorcery was directed upon him; he, therefore, could not sleep soundly, but became more and more restless. Finally he sprang up and looked out; he drew near the place of the enchantment and fell down dead." Hrút afterward avenged his son's death by causing Kotkel and Grima to be stoned.*

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* Eg. S. 75.

By means of these enchantments called seið, it was believed that the sorcerer could call up storms and all manner of injuries, transform himself into the likeness of animals, and enable himself to foretell coming events. This art appears to have been mostly employed for doing injury, and was considered a far more ignoble art than the incantations (galldr). Its origin was ascribed to the Goddess Freyja, and it appears to have been mostly practiced by women, who were called witches (seiðkona, *plur.* seiðkonur). The great abhorrence which many, even in heathen times, had for this kind of sorcery, is seen in King Harald Hárfagri's proceedings against his own son Ragnvald Rettilbein, whom he put to death because he meddled with this kind of witchcraft.*

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* Laxd. S, 37.

There are many kinds of sorcery mentioned in the ancient Sagas without being expressly classed under either of the above-named principal heads, but which, doubtless, were in some way connected with them more or less remotely. The most important of them shall here be cited.

Jugglery (sjónhverfingar, from sjón, *sight*, and hverfa, *to turn*) was performed by blinding the eyes of the people with magic arts, so that certain objects appeared to them totally different from what they really were. This kind of sorcery is often spoken of in the ancient Sagas as being employed by magicians when they wished to conceal any person from hostile pursuit, or to frighten his enemies. In such cases the pursuers saw, as it is stated, an animal, a coffin, or some other animate or inanimate object, in the very place where the person was whom they were looking for, while on the other hand they fancied they saw troops of armed men coming to aid the one they pursued, where there was nothing in reality but a herd of cows or sheep. The magician was also believed to have power to blind others in the same manner with regard to himself. But if the pursuers either broke the inanimate thing in pieces or killed the animal, under whose form they saw the real object, then their vision cleared up and they saw the person in his true form lying dead. Certain people, however, were believed to possess such strong natural powers that their eyes remained unblinded by this kind of sorcery.*

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* Snor.; Har. Hárf. S. 36.

Intimately connected with the above, was the power, often mentioned in the Sagas, of becoming invisible, through which the magician by his arts could make himself or any one else that he chose become totally invisible. He was then said to "make a hiding-helmet" (gera huliðs-hjálm) for himself or others. This kind of invisibility is sometimes described as being produced by a sort of dust, of the appearance of ashes, which the magician scattered over and about those whom he wished to conceal.

The belief in actual transformations, especially into the forms of animals, was also universal. Such transformations could either be brought upon others to their injury—as, for instance, it is related of the magic-skilled Queen Hvíta, that in hatred to her step-son who had rejected her love, she changed him into a bear by the stroke of a wolf-skin glove†—or they could be assumed by the magician himself, in order that in his enchanted form he might pass more easily and quickly to distant places. This latter sort of transformation occurs most frequently in the Sagas, and the journey by this mode was designated hamför, gandreið, or, at renna göndum.‡ On such occasions the human body was believed to lie as if dead or in an enchanted sleep, while the soul, inclosed in the form of a whale, a seal, a falcon, or any other animal that might be found best adapted to the object of its magic journey, roamed abroad in other places. It was then necessary to be careful not to speak the sorcerer's name nor wake up the sleeping body, for by doing so the whole charm was destroyed and the spirit was compelled to turn back to its own proper habitation again. Should there be any injury done to the assumed form—or, as it was called, hamr—it affected the real body. Women who undertook these enchanted flights in transformation, were called hamhleypur (*sing.* hamhleypa, a witch, a lamia; from *hamr*, and *hleypa*, to run). Certain women, it was believed, could transform themselves into Nightmares (mara, or kveldriða), and in this disguise smother people in their sleep, or do them some other injury in the night.* Finally, it was also admitted as a possibility that people could mutually exchange their outward appearance (skipta litum). In all such transformations, however, it appears that they believed the eyes—that reflection of the human soul—to remain unchanged.

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* Hörðs S., Eyrb. S. et al.

† Hrólfs Kraka S. 20.

‡ Hamför—from hamr, outward form—denotes a journey in an assumed form. Gandr, a wolf, a dragon, and especially, a demon-animal; gandreið, the ride upon such animals, and renna göndum, to travel upon them.

There was another species of charmed sleep beside that above-mentioned, in which sorcerer's body lay while his soul wandered abroad in an assumed form, which it was believed the magicians could bring upon others by pricking them with a so-called soporific thorn (svefn-þorn). This enchanted sleep, it was thought, could not be released so long as the thorn remained lying on the body of the spellbound person, or clinging to his clothes.

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* The punishment for such women is established in the Anc· Laws of Norway, I., p. 403.

Some magicians were believed to have so great power in their eyes that by the mere glance they could turn the edge of a sword in battle, and also with an eye-glance make the earth tremble and be convulsed, scorch the grass, and frighten their enemies out of their wits, so that they would run like hunted beasts, and even become changed into brutes (in the Old-Norse, verða at gjallti, become swine). In order to make this last-named sorcery very effectual, it was necessary to throw their bodies into the most unnatural positions, so that their appearance should be the more frightful; and their success then depended very much on whether the person who practiced the sorcery got to see his antagonist first; if the contrary happened, then the charm lost all power. In the Vatnsdæla Saga, an Icelandic sorceress named Ljót is described in an undertaking of this kind. Her son Hrolleif had killed the chieftain Ingemund of Hof. The sons of Ingemund, wishing to avenge their father's death, set out for Ljót's abode with that intention. They arrived just as the witch was busied in preparing a sacrifice for the protection of her son, and they succeeded in capturing Hrolleif as he was leaving the dwelling house to go into the house of sacrifice. While they were making ready to slay him, one of their company became aware of Ljót, whom he saw coming toward them in the most hideous form. She had thrown one foot over her head and went backwards upon one hand and foot, with her face sticking out behind; her eyes were hideous and demon-like. This appearance did not, however, prevent the brothers from putting Hrolleif to death. Ljót herself was immediately seized. She now confessed that it had been her intention to go in this manner over the whole neighborhood and to drive the sons of Ingemund out of their senses, so that they would run crazy about the roads with the wild-beasts; and this would have happened if she had only seen them before they got sight of her; but now their attendant spirit had been too powerful for her. They put Ljót to death.* When the Icelandic chieftain Olaf Pá surprised the dangerous sorcerer Stigandi sleeping, he caused a skin to be drawn over his head in order that his sight, when he awoke, should do no harm to any one. But there happened to be a little hole in the skin, and Stigandi cast his eyes out through this over a beautiful, grassy mountain-slope which was opposite. Instantly it appeared as though a whirlwind had broken loose upon this spot and turned the earth up-side-down in such a manner that from that time there was never any more grass grew upon it. Stigandi was stoned to death by Olaf and his men.† The same precaution as that here mentioned was employed by the renowned sorceress Gunhilda, afterward the queen of Eirik Blood-axe, when she betrayed the two Finns who had instructed her in magic arts, and whose sight, it was said, was so sharp when they were angry that the earth was torn up by it, and any living being that met them fell down dead. She drew two seal-skins over their heads and then let King Eirik's men kill them.*

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* Vatnsd. S. 26; compare Gullþóris Saga.

† Laxd. S. 38.

Enchanted food and drink are mentioned in many places both in the old Eddaic poems and in the Sagas. It was believed that, by means of such food or drink, the dispositions of men could be changed, courage and ferocity awakened, or forgetfulness induced. The flesh, and especially the heart and blood of certain strong and wild animals —wolves, for instance—when used as food, were regarded as a means of making men bold and cruel. To obtain a charmed drink, they mingled together a variety of things which superstition had endowed with magic powers; runes were also employed—sometimes read as magic formulas over the potion, sometimes carved upon wood or bone and cast into it. The term enchanted drink was also frequently understood to mean a poisonous drink.

The belief in enchanted clothing and armor was likewise very prevalent. Clothes were enchanted, either to secure the wearer against wounds or to bring injury or death upon him. It is said of the chieftain Thorer Hund, that he had several reindeer frocks (hreinbjálfar) made for himself by the Finns, which were charmed in such a manner that no weapon could take effect upon them; and in the battle by Stiklastad one of these frocks protected him against the sword of Olaf the Saint, when the king hewed him right over the shoulders. "The sword did not bite; it seemed only to raise the dust on the reindeer frock."* The Orkneian Jarl Harald Hákonsson died, it is stated, by dressing himself in charmed clothing made by his own mother and her sister, but which was intended for his step-brother Pál Jarl.† Swords were sometimes so charmed, say the accounts, that success in battle always followed the men who wielded them, and the wounds they made could not be healed until they were touched by a so-called life-stone (lífsteinn), which accompanied the sword. In the use of this kind of charmed swords, there were many things to be observed when they were to have the proper effect. Thus, for example, the renowned sword Sköfnúng, which was taken out of Hrólf Kraki's burial mound, was not to be drawn in the presence of woman, nor so that the sun could shine upon the hilt, or it would lose somewhat of its peculiar virtue.‡

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* Snor.: Har. Hárf. S. 34.

Magic-skilled women used sometimes to pass their hands over the bodies of persons going to battle, in order to discover by this means what place upon them was most liable to be wounded. It was believed that they could feel a protuberance in every such place, and then a special protective remedy was applied to the spot. If no such protuberance was perceived, it was thought, accordingly, that no danger was to be apprehended.

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* Snor.: Ol. Hel. S. 204, 240.

† Orkney. S. p. 144.

‡ Laxd. S. 57.

A peculiar kind of sorcery was the so-called *sitting-out* (útiseta, at sitja úti), in which the magician sat out at night under the open sky, and by certain magic performances now no longer known, perhaps most frequently by incantations (galldur), was believed to call up evil spirits (vekja upp troll) or awaken the dead in order to consult them. It was especially to inquire into the future that this kind of sorcery was resorted to. An invocation of the dead, not just for this object, but which was to clear up an affair concerning which there was some doubt of gaining light by natural means, is described in the Færeyínga Saga. The crafty Thrond of Gata, an inhabitant of the Faroes, who it appears had been forced to accept baptism although he was still a rank heathen at heart, wished to find out how the renowned hero Sigmund Brestarsson had met with his death; whether he had been drowned while attempting with two others to escape by swimming from Thrond's pursuit, or whether he had reached the land and was killed there. For this purpose he had a great fire kindled in the presence of a large concourse of people, and set up four panels of lattice work in a square around the fire, and traced nine sentences (reitar) upon the earthen floor around the inclosure. He then seated himself upon a chair between the fire and the railing, and forbade the bystanders to speak. After he had been sitting thus a long time, the ghosts of Sigmund's two companions, who were dripping wet, made their appearance, went up to the fire and warmed themselves, and then passed out again. At length came Sigmund himself, bloody and bearing his head in his hand; he stood a good while upon the floor and then left the room. Thrond now rose up groaning with fatigue, and declared himself to be convinced by the vision that Sigmund's companions were drowned, but that he himself had reached the land and there met with a violent death.*

It was believed that sorcerers could obtain great assistance from certain animals. Thus we find frequent mention of the art of interpreting the voice of birds, as a means of important discoveries. The crow was in this respect a bird of great significance, and that the raven was so, is to be inferred from the myth of Odin's news-bringing ravens. The cat is also mentioned as an animal specially loved by sorcerers. The magic-skilled Icelander Thorolf Skeggi, of Vatnsdal, is said to have had no less than twenty large black cats, that bravely defended their master when he was attacked by the Sons of Ingemund of Hof, and gave eighteen men enough to do.†

Although people were not wanting among the Northmen who, by a more than ordinary knowledge of the powers of nature, made their superstitious contemporaries believe that they were skilled in magic, yet the Finns were even in a remote antiquity looked upon as the chief masters in sorcery, with whom even the Norsemen, who wished to perfect themselves more fully in the art, went formally to school. The famous Queen Gunhilda, who was sent in her youth to Finnmark in order to learn witchcraft, may serve as an instance. Finns skilled in magic were often sent for and consulted, when any important magic operation was to be performed. They were regarded as especially capable of undertaking the so-called hamfarir, or magic flights in transformation.

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* Færeyínga S. 40.

† Vatnsd. S. 28.

In heathen times the magicians were often prosecuted, and even tried before the courts, and punished by a sentence of law; but this was not actually done because they practiced sorcery, but because it was believed that they could be convicted of having done harm with their sorcery. It is spoken of as a universal custom to stone evil-disposed sorcerers and witches.

It was not to be expected that Christianity should be able to tear out at once the deep-rooted faith of the Northmen in Sorcery, especially when not only the first Christian teachers, but also the clergy throughout all the Middle Ages, were as fully convinced of the existence of sorcery as the heathens were. The only difference between them was, that the teachers of Christianity regarded it as an abomination, a work of the devil, which they should strive to check, even by application of the severest measures; while the Asa-faith, on the contrary, represented it to be a knowledge imparted to man by the Gods themselves, a knowledge, therefore, which, by its abuse only, could deserve punishment. Of the belief of the Christian teachers in sorcery, and their zeal to eradicate it, there is abundant evidence furnished by the penal decrees on that subject which are found in the ancient Norwegian church laws. But how strictly soever the laws of the church may have forbidden all practice of sorcery, there were still many Northmen who continued, for a long time after the fall of the Asa-faith, to look upon witchcraft as an art which it was profitable to cultivate.

CHAPTER XXV.

EXPLORING THE FUTURE; DIVINATION.

THE investigation of the Future was most intimately connected with Sorcery.

The heathen Northmen believed that there were means by which man could prevail on the Gods to make known their will, or to reveal things which otherwise, in the order of Nature, must remain hidden from the human understanding. This kind of inquiry was named, sometimes, frétt—an interrogation, investigation—(from frétta, to ask), and to undertake it was "at ganga til fréttar," to consult the oracle; and sometimes it was termed spá, or *plural*, spár—prophecy, divination—and to make application to it was "at spyrja spá," to inquire out the prophecy—or "at lyða spám," to listen to prophecies.

Concerning the mode in which this kind of inquiry into the Future took place, our old manuscripts give no special information. It appears to have been most usual for the explorer of the Future, while invoking or sacrificing to a deity, either to demand as a response some signal which he left to the God himself to decide upon, and which he recognized in any remarkable event occurring at the time, and then interpreted in such a mode as appeared most probable according to the circumstances, or else to decide upon the signal himself by which the divinity was to answer him.

We have seen that the zealous Asa-worshiper Hákon Jarl made use of the former mode when he sacrificed to Odin before his bold march through Gothland, and he interpreted it as a promise from the God of success in the expedition, when two ravens during the sacrifice came flying along and screaming loudly. When the Icelandic chieftain Thorkel the Tall invoked the God Frey for vengeance upon his enemy Viga-Glum, and at the same time demanded a signal that the God had heard his prayer, he regarded it as a favorable response of Frey when the ox, which he had led out as an offering, immediately fell with loud bellowing upon the ground and died.* The latter mode we find applied by the emigrating Northmen, in choosing their places of residence in foreign lands by direction of the Sacred Columns. In this they believed that the God, whom they invoked beforehand, directed the columns to a place where a prosperous abode was vouchsafed to them and their descendants.

An important ceremony of measurement which was employed in building a new house, in order to find out what fortune was in store in it for its future occupants, was also of the same character. This ceremony was performed by measuring the foundations repeatedly—say three times—and very carefully noting whether there was any difference in dimensions between the first and last measurement. If the last was greatest they believed it to forbode increasing prosperity to the occupant of the house; but if the contrary happened, then they believed it would always go down-hill with him.

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* Viga-Gl. S. 9.

The second above-mentioned mode of consulting the Gods appears to have been the most generally employed. Two kinds of exploration of the future are mentioned in the Sagas, which may be referred to this class, namely, by means of sacred leaves or slips (blótspánn) and by prophetic lots (hlotar or hlutar), both, doubtless, a species of lot-casting in principle, but practiced by different modes.

To consult the Gods by the first-named species of oracle was "at fella blótspánn," *i. e.*, to drop the sacred leaves. Although this is very often mentioned in the old manuscripts, yet the details are nowhere described. We must, therefore, be content with probable conjectures to which the ancient name, compared with descriptions of similar modes of consulting the Gods among people nearly related to the Northmen, may lead us.

The expression "at fella blótspánn" seems to imply that the exploration was effected by the casting of consecrated slips or pieces of wood.

We find the casting of lots (Sortilegium, of the Romans) employed as a means of divination among many of the nations of antiquity—the Greeks, Romans, Scythians, Alani, Germans, and others. Of the mode of foretelling events by casting lots, as employed by the Germans, the near kinsmen of the Northmen, we find the following account by Tacitus: "They (the Germans) pay strict attention to omens and the casting of lots (sortes). The usual mode of casting lots (sortium consuetudo) is simple. A bough cut from a fruit-tree is divided into small slips (surculos), which are marked, each with its sign, and cast out at random upon a white cloth. Thereupon the State Priest, if the consultation be public, or the master of the household himself, if it be private, makes a prayer to the Gods, and, with eyes uplifted toward heaven, takes up every twig three times, and explains them according to the marks set beforehand upon them."* Of the Alani it is said by Ammianus Marcellinus, "They explore the future by a remarkable method. They collect osier twigs (virgas vimineas) which are tolerably straight, scatter them about for a certain time, while they sing mysterious incantations, and then they know with certainty what they signify."† By this is meant, no doubt, that after thus scattering the twigs about, they foretold the future by the relative positions in which they settled.

If we turn to these descriptions for explanation of the old Norse expression, "at fella blótspánn," it will appear highly probable that this expression denotes a prophetic lot-casting precisely similar to that employed by the Germans and Alani. Besides, if we take into consideration the use which the heathen Northmen made of runes, as well as the nature of these characters, this supposition is strengthened, and even passes over into a certainty.

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* Tacitus: Germ. c. 10.

† Ammian., lib. 31, c. 2.

Of the employment of runes in sorcery as magic characters, we have before spoken; that they were also applied to the art of divination, so nearly allied to sorcery, can hardly be doubted. Each runic character has a name denoting some object of importance in life, something to be desired or feared, concerning which it might, therefore, be desirable to consult the Gods. Thus, for instance, the name of the character A is ár, a year, fruitfulness; I is ís, ice; F is fé, cattle, money, (pecus, pecunia), &c. Moreover, all runes are formed by a combination of right lines, whence no doubt their name stafir, *sing.*, stafr, a staff, stave. Thus, when a number of straight sticks were thrown up, they might very easily fall in such relative positions toward one another, as to form runic characters, and from the significant names of these figures a prophecy could be traced out. No doubt an improvement was afterward made in the matter, by carving a rune upon each of the sticks. By scattering them and afterward either blindly picking them up one by one, after the manner of the Germans, or by viewing their relative positions as a whole, it was easy to fabricate a prophecy quite satisfactory to the superstition of the times.

Such was, beyond all doubt, the nature of the divination by blótspánn employed by the heathen Northmen. That they also invoked the Gods thereby, and sang magic songs and incantations, like the Germans and Alani, is highly probable.

The second species of exploring the future, *i. e.*, by means of *divination-lots*, is found more minutely described in the Sagas. In the three most detailed accounts we have of the invasion of Norway by the Jomsburg sea-rovers, it is related how Hákon Jarl, in order to gain over the Skald Einar, afterward surnamed Skálaglam, presented to him a costly *divining-balance*, with the accompanying weights. The best descriptions of this divining apparatus are in this wise: "Then the Jarl (Hákon) takes a good balance-scale (skálir góðar) which he had in his possession. It was made of burnished silver and was all gilt. With it there were two weights (met), the one of gold, the other of silver, upon each of which there was a figure wrought (a human figure, according to the other two accounts). They were called hlotar (by the others, hlutar) and were in reality *lot-casting* weights (hlutir; *Latin*, sortes) such as people of that time used to have. A great power lay hidden in them, and on all occasions which were deemed by the Jarl to be of importance, he made use of these weights. He would then place them in the scales, appointing at the same time what each one was to decide for him; and always when the throwing turned out well, and the one came up that he desired, the weight indicating his choice was restless in the scale and turned gently about in it so as to give out a clinking sound. This treasure the Jarl gives to Einar, and Einar is greatly rejoiced therewith."*

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* Jómsvíkínga S. 42 in Fornm. S. XI. p. 128.

This sketch, although not in every way satisfactory, gives an idea of the *divination-weights* of the heathen Northmen. We may imagine the two weights to have been precisely equal, and the balance upon which they were thrown very delicate and easily turned. The one was made to denote what the person wished for, the other, what he did not wish. It was probably imagined that that would happen which the weight that rose up in the balance indicated; and which of the weights this might be depended entirely upon chance. The human figure, said to have been stamped upon the weights, probably denoted the divinity from whom they demanded a response by the casting of the lots. The special power that lay in Hákon Jarl's divining-weights, appears to have been chiefly in the sound which it was imagined was to be heard in the scales when the good weight came up.

They also sought information concerning the future from men who, by being gifted with superior powers—and this mostly by the aid of magic means—were believed to be able to penetrate the hidden decrees of Fate.

Seers (menn framsýnir, menn forspáir) are frequently mentioned in our ancient Sagas. Their gift of foreseeing and foretelling certain things was usually regarded as inborn. What brought them into repute was, doubtless, in most cases, a keen understanding, a more than ordinary knowledge of nature, a deeper insight into human character, and an attentive observance of past and present events in their causes and effects. More was not required in those unenlightened times to bring one into notice as a prophet or prophetess, especially when a certain natural or assumed mysteriousness, and a wise application of circumstances, were added. Such seers were believed to have a presentiment of coming events of importance, and to be able to see by one's features and manners what his fate would be. That both these species of prophecy should often hit the mark is not so wonderful, when we consider on one hand the intimate relation between the Past and Future, and on the other, how strongly the character of a people of inferior cultivation is usually expressed in their features, and also how common it is that a man's disposition shapes his good or evil destiny. Whatever might be wanting in the accuracy of the supposed prophecies, was filled out by the superstition of the age, which often, when the event had actually happened, involuntarily adapted to it the words with which the seer might be supposed to have announced it beforehand. His fame thus grew sometimes without his own coöperation; his contemporaries listened to every expression that fell from his lips, as to the response of an oracle, and After-ages ascribed to him prophecies which in all probability never came from his lips.

Many of the seers of heathen times believed, probably by the aid of a certain enthusiasm, that they actually received higher revelations, but there were also many, doubtless, who were fully conscious of the true state of the case with their gifts of prophecy. It is, however, easy to imagine that the latter seldom opposed the superstition concerning their supernatural powers, for the distinction which the fame of their prophetic faculty conferred upon them was too alluring, and they were also influenced by baser motives. A good prophecy was mostly well rewarded, while a prophecy of evil was a grand medium for striking terror where revenge and delight in mischief could not by any better means be appeased.

Those who made a source of gain of their supposed gift of prophecy, willingly took refuge in the magic arts in order to increase their fame. Incantations, witchcraft, transformations, nocturnal sittings, and similar magic performances were the means by which they made the people, and perhaps themselves, believe that they received their revelations. All such arts were believed to cause no trifling exertions to the one who practiced them, and they had, therefore, to be well paid for. The Finns, both men and women, were also regarded as especially skilled in penetrating the future.

Of those among the Northmen of Antiquity who made a business of foretelling the future, the most remarkable were the so-called Valas (Vala or Völva, *plur.* Völvur), or the Spæ-wives (Spákonur), on account of the extraordinary honor they universally enjoyed. The Valas are mentioned in the poems of the Older Edda, and the most remarkable of these poems is ascribed to such a prophetess, whence its name—Völuspá, the Prophecy of the Vala—is derived. It appears that they were sometimes called Norns, and regarded as a kind of superior, semi-godlike beings, as bodily revelations of the subordinate Norns, which, according to the Asa-faith, were sent out from the three great Goddesses of Fate at Urdar's Fount, to measure out the life of individual men and appoint their fate, which they consequently were able to announce beforehand. But so high a conception of the Norns was hardly maintained during the heathen ages, especially in the latter years; yet they were always looked upon as most remarkable beings, who at least were considered to be under the special protection of the great Norns, and to receive revelations from them. Men, therefore, not only listened with eagerness to their prophecies, but they also rejoiced at their good wishes and feared their curses; for to both had been ascribed extraordinary power. For this reason people took all possible pains to make the Vala, whom they wished to consult, incline propitiously towards them and their house. The Vala wandered by invitation from house to house, and everywhere people vied with each other in doing honor to her while she staid, and in bestowing rich gifts upon her at her departure Her dress and address were calculated to attract attention. A seat of distinction was ready for her wherever she came, and magic performances, such as seiðr and galldr, were practiced as preliminary measures for opening her prophetic vision.

The Saga of Eirik the Red contains a very detailed account of a Vala and her proceedings, during her visit to Thorkel, a distinguished chieftain among the Norwegian settlers of Greenland in the later heathen times. "At that time," it is stated, "there was a great famine in Greenland. Those who had gone to the wild districts (hunting and fishing), had met with little success, on account of storms and bad roads. Some had never returned. There was a woman living in the settlement, whose name was Thorbjörg; she was a Spae-wife, and was called the little Vala or Prophetess (litil-völva). She had had nine sisters, of whom she was the only survivor. Thorbjörg was in the habit of going round to the festivals, and she was invited chiefly by those who wished to learn their fate and the coming seasons. As Thorkel was the best man of the settlement, it seemed to be incumbent upon him to gain some information when the prevailing famine should cease. Thorkel therefore invites the Spae-wife to his house and prepares for her a good reception, such as was customary when a woman of her standing was expected. A cushion was prepared for her; it had to be stuffed with hen-feathers. It was laid upon the high-seat in the evening, when she came in with the man who had been sent out to receive her. She was dressed on this occasion as follows:—She wore a blue cloak with fastenings of cords (tyglarmötull), set with stones around the border from top to bottom (alt í skaut ofan). Around her neck she had glass beads; upon her head a black lambskin hood (kofri), lined with white catskin. She carried a staff mounted with brass, with the head inlaid with stones. She was girded with a young bearskin belt (húnskan linda), and to this hung a large pouch in which she kept the instruments of magic belonging to her occupation. On her feet she wore shaggy calfskin shoes with long, heavy thongs, on the ends of which were large brass buttons (látúns knappar). She had catskin gloves upon her hands, white within and shaggy. When she entered, every one felt it a duty to greet her with reverence; she returned their salutations according to what she thought of each one individually. Thorkel took the wise woman (vísinda konunni) by the hand and conducted her to the seat prepared for her. He requested her to cast her eyes over (renna augum yfir) his herds and property and house. She said but little concerning all this. In the evening the tables were set, and now it shall be told what dishes were made ready for the Spae-wife. There was groats, made of goats' milk (kiða mjólk); but her food was prepared from the hearts of every kind of animal that there was in the neighborhood. She had a brass spoon, and a knife of copper with a shaft of walrus-tooth and a double sheath (knif tannskeptan tvíhólkaðan af eiri); the point of it was broken off. When the tables were cleared, Thorkel Bondi goes up to Thorbjörg and asks what she thinks of the house and the appearance of the people, and also how soon she will have a revelation concerning the things he has asked her about and which the people are all anxious to know. She answers that she cannot make this known before morning, after she has slept there over night. Early in the morning all the arrangements were made for her which belong to the incantations of Seiðr. She then asked them to furnish her with women who knew the magic formulas (fræði) of that ceremony, and who are called Varðlokur, *i. e.*, the Watch-guard; but none could be found who knew it, although inquiry was made at all the neighboring houses. Then Guðrið, a young girl who was present, said, 'I am not skilled in magic nor any wise woman; but my foster-mother in Iceland taught me a formula, which she called Varðlokur.' Thorkel said, 'Thou art wiser than I thought.' Guðrið answered, 'This formula and the proceedings connected with it are of such a character that I cannot be present to assist with them; for I am a Christian.' Thorkel replied, 'Thou couldst help us in this matter without harming thyself thereby; I should be glad to furnish Thorbjörg with whatever is necessary.' He then persuaded Guðrið so long that she at length promised to fulfill his wishes. Now Thorbjörg sat upon the witch-seat (seiðhjallr), and the women formed a circle around her. Guðrið sang the song so beautifully and so well, that no one of the bystanders thought they had ever heard a fairer song. Even the Spae-wife thought the song was beautiful to hear, and thanked her for it when it was done. 'Now,' says Thorbjörg, 'I have reflected on the matter, how it will be both with the sickness and with the seasons; and much has now been made clear to me that before was hidden from me and from others.' She then foretold that the famine and sickness which were raging, should both disappear in the spring. To Guðrið she prophesied, in return for the services she had rendered, a very happy fate in the future, and also that a renowned family (the Sturlungs of Iceland) should be descended from her. Afterward all the company went one after the other to the Spae-wife and consulted her about the future matters which they wished to know; and she gave them definite answers. Soon afterwards she was invited to another house, and went thither; but her prophecies concerning the coming events of the year were entirely fulfilled."*

The truth of this description is confirmed by the accounts—more imperfect, it is true—which are recorded of the Valas in other Sagas. Thus Örvar-Odd's Saga relates of Heið, a Vala and Witch of Norway, that she wandered around to the festivals attended by fifteen boys and fifteen girls. She foretold the peculiarities of the seasons and the destiny of men. When she came by invitation to the house of Ingjald, he went out with all his attendants to meet her. After the evening meal, when the house-folk had retired to bed, the Vala and her companions set about their nocturnal vigils (fór til náttfarsseiðs.) In the morning, the people of the house came in one after another before her seat and listened to her prophecies. After a sojourn of three days she departed with rich gifts.† We here see that it was customary to practice seið during the night, before the solemn prophecies were to be uttered in the morning. The boys and girls who accompanied Heið were, doubtless, to form the circle around the witches' seat and to sing the enchanting song. A Vala's train in Norway could of course be far more splendid and awe-inspiring than in the poor and thinly-settled Greenland. The Vatnsdæla Saga represents the Icelandic Spae-wife Thordis as being so highly esteemed, that even at the assemblies she was chosen arbitrator in the most important cases. Her dress was a black hooded-cloak (kufl), and her staff Hangnuðr was believed to have the power to impart forgetfulness to any man who was touched by it three times upon the left cheek, but it would restore his memory when he was struck by it three times upon his right cheek.* The staff (seiðstafr, völr) appears, on the whole, to have been the Vala's most important mark of dignity, which was even to accompany her into the grave. Some have also supposed that the name Vala stands in connection with völr, a stick.

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* Saga af Eiriki Rauða, 5.

† Orv. Odds S. 2.

Something remains to be said, in conclusion, concerning the heathen Northmen's belief in dreams and omens.

To all dreams that appeared in any way unusual they gave a meaning, and the people who were thought to possess special gifts in interpreting them were called draumspekingar, *i. e.*, Dream-wise. But the interpretation was mostly very arbitrary, and it is, indeed, probable that the greater part of the significant dreams which the Sagas can give account of, were invented, or at least greatly embellished, after the event which they are said to have foreboded had already taken place. The significant revelations in dreams made by the Fylgjur have been already mentioned.* There was often a great diversity of opinion concerning the manner in which a dream should be interpreted; an example may show how uncertain the interpretations mostly were. An Icelandic chieftain named Thorkel Silfra dreamed, on the night before he expected to be chosen Goði in Vatnsdal, that he rode through the valley upon a red horse so swiftly that the horse's feet scarcely touched the ground. He interpreted the dream to refer to the new dignity which he had in expectation. But his wife was of another mind. "A horse," said she, "is called by another name, *mar;* but mar signifies also a man's Fylgja, and that which is bloody appears red." From this she explained the meaning to be, that Thorkel would be killed at the meeting, which also happened.† It was also a very ancient superstition that people did not have equally significant dreams in all places. What was presented to one when he slept in a new house, was thought deserving of special attention. Some, again, used to sleep in a pig-sty in order to obtain revelations in their dreams. The history of King Hálfdan Svarti, who in this manner received information of the future greatness of his family, is well known.‡

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* Vatnsd. S. 2.

Concerning omens (fyrirburðir), which appear to have been presented to people in a waking state, both in visions and by other means, there are likewise many accounts in the Sagas. Certain omens, it was believed, were repeated before events of a corresponding character. Thus it was thought to denote a near-approaching violent death when a person saw his own Fylgja bloody. The wise Icelandic chieftain Niál said to his workman Thord, when the latter seemed to see a goat lie bleeding in his yard: "That is neither a goat nor anything else, but thou art a doomed man; thou hast seen thy Fylgja."* The same was the case when any one seemed to see blood upon the table instead of food, or when the portion of food assigned to him vanished. It was a universal belief that as an omen of a near-approaching bloody battle, blood sometimes dripped from axes, swords, or spears, or that there was a loud singing in those weapons when men were taking them up to arm themselves. With this class of omens may be reckoned the so-called Urdar Moon (urðarmáni) which was believed to forebode a great mortality in the place where it appeared. This appearance is described in the Eyrbyggja Saga: "One evening as the people of Frodá (an estate in western Iceland) were sitting around the fire, they saw a half-moon upon the wall. All who were in the house could see it. This moon passed backward from the sun around the house, and did not vanish so long as the people sat by the fire. Thorodd, the master of the house, asked Thorir Tréfót what this could indeed mean. Thorir answered that it was Urdar moon, and that it foreboded death. On every evening during a whole week this moon made its appearance."* The name Urðarmáni seems to indicate that it was regarded as a sign from the Norns, or from the highest Norn Urður.

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* Chap. XVIII.

† Vatnsd. S. 42.

‡ Snor.: Hálfd. Sv. S. 7.

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* Niáls S. 41.

There were other omens which were believed to be peculiar to certain remarkable events. Such are repeatedly mentioned in the Sagas, and it mostly belongs to the history of every event of more than usual importance in public or private life, to have some omen brought up as going before it. Sometimes there are accounts of the revelations of supernatural beings, who by significant but enigmatical songs announced what was to happen, while at other times the omens consisted only of strange sights in the air or upon the earth.

Finally, they often perceived omens in quite natural occurrences, which were expounded by certain established rules, according to the circumstances of the case. Thus when they marched out to battle it was considered a good omen if they saw a raven flying in the same direction, or if they perceived two men standing in conversation, or heard a wolf howl; but if any one stumbled in going out to battle, it was thought to forebode evil. When a man was slain by arms and fell forwards, it was accepted as an omen that he should be avenged; and the vengeance, it was believed, would strike the one who stood directly before him when he fell.

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* Eyrb. S. 72.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OTHER SUPERSTITIONS.

Beside the belief in sorcery and divination, many other superstitions prevailed among the heathen Northmen which were either directly or indirectly connected with their religion.

First in this connection may be noticed the different kinds of supernatural beings with which their imagination peopled the mountains, the interior of the earth, and the sea; beings which have been alluded to above only in a partial manner, in so far as they appear in the Asa Mythology in a higher mythic significance or as they were objects of popular worship.

The strongest and most terrible of these beings were the Jötuns or Giants, who were also called Rísar, Thursar, Tröll, Bergbúar, and their wives were named Tröllkonar and Gygar. The mythic significance of these beings has been already spoken of.* They were represented to be shapeless giants, of a dark and hideous aspect. Their usual dwelling place was thought to be in the wild mountains. They were, it is certain, most usually imagined to be the enemies of mankind, a representation which most nearly coincides with the manner in which they manifest themselves in the Asa Mythology, but it was also believed that people could sometimes make friends of them, and then these mountain genii became the trusty guardians of house and property. They were believed to shun the light of the sun, and if the sun surprised them out of their mountain homes, they were transformed to stone. The Troll-women were represented as most frequently making their appearance in riding upon wolves, with serpents for their bridles.

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* Chap. XII. and XVIII.

A peculiar kind of Thurs or Demon is mentioned under the name of Brunnmígi, which was believed to dwell in the springs and streams that gush out of mountains. The name signifies one who makes water in the fountains, and it seems in this connection to indicate that to this kind of genius was ascribed the origin of all mineral or ill-tasted, ill-scented waters. This also agrees with the myth of the saltness of the sea being produced by beings of Jötun nature.*

It was supposed that the Thursar and human beings could form marriage connections with each other, and hence arose a blended race, the so-called blendingar (hybrids) who retained, both in character and appearance, something that gave evidence of their twofold origin. By being afterwards united with mankind through many generations, the Thursar nature of these hybrids could by degrees be worn away. Such a descent was no doubt conferred upon the men who received the surname of Hálftröll. A giant-like, hideous appearance and a ferocious disposition may have given cause for such an idea, especially when those qualities were hereditary through several generations of one family.

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* The L. Edda: Skálda 43.

The belief in Dwarves as inhabitants of the interior of the earth and especially of large isolated rocks, was likewise a direct offshoot of the Asa-Mythology.

These beings were considered to be great artists in preparing metals. Weapons of remarkably good properties were said to be produced from their subterranean workshops. The Dwarves, like the Jötuns, could not endure the sunlight; they became turned into stone if they were approached by its rays while out of their dwellings.* It was also believed that if a man met a dwarf away from his rock, and should throw steel between him and his home, he could close up his habitation to him and thereby become able to extort from him whatever he wished. As Echo in the Old-Norse was called "Dwarf language" (dvergmál), it is highly probable that the people imagined it to be produced by the Dwarves living within the mountains, who imitated the sound they heard without.

Although the Dwarves in the Asa doctrine have a very important mythic signification, yet they appear to have been in general quite as little an object of worship among the Northmen as were the Jötuns. It was only when a Jötun or a Dwarf was occasionally looked up to as the guardian spirit of a certain estate or a certain district, that he could be worshiped in the character of "Land Guardian." The same might be the case with beings of the Dwarf race when they were regarded as the Dísir of particular persons or families.

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* The O. Edda: Alvísmál, 36.

In regard to other supernatural beings who lived in the popular belief, their connection with the Asa doctrine is not so easily seen. Such are the Mermen and Mermaids, the Nykar, Finngalknar and Dragons.

The Merman was called Marmennill. His form and appearance are nowhere described. The most remarkable attribute of this being was his gift of prophecy. It was believed that if a man should be so fortunate as to fish up a merman from the sea, he could compel him to foretell his destiny. The Marmennill could also live awhile upon dry land, but it took no pleasure in that kind of life, and pined for its home in the sea.

The Mermaid (Margygur) is described as having the form of a woman to the belt, but that of a fish below. It was believed to presage good or evil to sea-farers. For instance, if one had risen above the surface of the sea, when it again dived under it foreboded evil if it turned itself towards the ship, but if it turned away from the ship it was then a presage of good. It may, however, be remarked of the superstition concerning this being, that it is possibly of a foreign and southern origin, and that it is the Syren that here presents itself, although in some degree fashioned after the notions of the Northmen.

The Nyk is described as a horse of a dapple-gray color, whose place of resort was in fresh-water streams, where it sometimes made its appearance on the banks. It appears to have been exceedingly strong, and it sometimes allowed itself to be taken by men and set to work during the day; but when the sun went down it tore itself out of the harness and ran off into the water again. Thus it is related of a certain Auðun Valisson, a settler of Iceland, that during harvest time he saw a dapple-gray stallion run out from Hjarðarvatn to some of his horses. Auðun caught the gray horse, harnessed it to a sled, which was usually drawn by two oxen, and hauled all his hay together with it. The horse was very easily managed in the middle of the day, but as evening came on it became restive and stamped in the ground up to its fetlocks, and after sunset it broke out of the harness, ran to the water and was never seen afterwards.* It appears, however, that the Nyk, especially in the Christian Middle Ages, was regarded as a being that could assume various forms. In Norway and Iceland the people still believe in the existence of this being, and they usually describe it just as it is described by the ancients. In Iceland at the present day it is called Nykr, and also Vatnhest or Nennir.†

The Finngálkn is a monster that is often mentioned, but not further described except in the later fictitious Sagas. According to these, it had the head of a man, with large teeth, the body of an animal, with a huge tail, terrible claws and a sword in every claw. But these descriptions seem rather to be creations of the Saga-writer's imagination, guided by the pictures of similar monsters in the myths of more southern nations, than to rest upon any ancient legend preserved from heathen times, although it is true the heathens had imagined the existence of a supernatural being of that name.

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* Landnmb. II. 10.

† Olafsen and Povelsen's Travels, p. 55.

Dragons, according to the most ancient heathen representations, were nothing more than monstrous serpents, by which name—ormar, *sing.* ormr—they are also mostly named in the older manuscripts. The superstition was prevalent that the *Orm*, especially the so-called lyngormr (doubtless the Dragon—*Danish*, Lindorm, *German*, Lindwurm—of the Danish and German legends and songs of the Middle Ages), if laid upon gold, would grow as large as the gold. It was thus with the serpent which, according to the legend, surrounded Thoras Borg, the Gothic King's daughter, and which Ragnar Loðbrók slew.* These imaginary monsters were often supposed to be the transformations of avaricious men who had voluntarily clothed themselves in this enchanted form in order to brood in safety over their gold. It was also said of them that they bore the Helmet of Terror (Ægishjálmar), with which they frightened away all living things. Thus Fafnir is described in the ancient legend which one of the Eddaic poems treats of.† Thus also, a somewhat later legend speaks of the Jómsvíking Búi the Thick, who in the battle at Hjörúngavág jumped overboard with his two heavy chests of gold, "that he transformed himself into a serpent upon the bottom of the sea, and there brooded over his treasures."* In later times these serpents were imagined to be winged dragons (flugrdrekar), probably after the legends of southern lands had been heard of, concerning such monsters.

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* Ragn. Loðbr. S. 1–2.

† The O. Edda: Fafnismál.

Deeply rooted in the minds of the heathen Northmen was the belief in ghosts and their apparitions (aptrganga, *plur.* aptrgöngur, reimleikar), and this belief appears to have been intimately connected with their ideas of a future state. The peculiar doctrines of the Asa-faith on this subject have been before unfolded. The soul was imagined to return to its original source—to Heaven and the Gods abiding there—while the body and the grosser life connected with it wandered to the abodes of Hel or Death. Herewith was very naturally connected the belief that the spirit of the departed could leave its home with the Gods and again visit the earth at night, in order to unite itself at the funeral mound with the bodily shadow, which was set free from Helheim. The departed were thus enabled sometimes to appear in the opening mounds in the same forms which they had worn in life. The old Eddaic poem of Helgi Hundingsbani makes the hero return by night from Valhalla, called back by the grief of his deserted wife Sigrún. Sigrún sees him with all his death-wounds, in the open mound; she goes in to him and they remain there together during the night. But with the dawning day he rides again upon his pale horse back to Valhalla; he must be there before the crowing of the cock shall awaken the Einherjar. When the dead thus made themselves visible by night in the open burial mounds, sometimes surrounded by flames of fire or by a clear light which cast no shadow, then the portals of Hel were said to be opened; then had Hel set free the bodily part to be united for a season with the soul, which came to the mound from Valhalla. Such apparitions were usually believed to be harmless, and to make their appearance only to comfort beloved survivors or to give them good counsel. When drowned persons came as apparitions to the funeral ceremonies which the survivors held to their memory, it was looked upon as a good omen; a token that the departed had met with a friendly reception from Rán.

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* Jómsv. S. 49 in Fornm. S. XI.

It was believed to be otherwise with men whose souls, by a contempt for the Gods, joined to wickedness and a base disposition, had rendered themselves unworthy of the joys of Heaven. Their whole being became at their death the prey of Hel, and whenever they left their funeral mounds they became frightful specters, whose delight it was to torment the living. It was said that when they thus made their appearance, they were stronger and far more hideous than they had been when living. They only showed themselves at night—when the sun was not shining. By day the undecayed body lay blue and bloated, but dead and quiet in the grave. The only power which it was thought to be possessed of then, was that of making itself so heavy that if any one tried to remove it, levers were necessary to raise it up and strong oxen strained themselves in attempting to drag it away. In mid-winter, at Yule-tide, the ravages of all specters were the worst, but in the height of summer-time people saw no traces of them. It was believed that they would kill the people whom they could lay hold of in their ghostly wanderings, or at least frighten them out of their senses, and but few of the Living were bold enough to dare, or strong enough to bear, an encounter with them. Even if the living should come off victorious, the bare remembrance of the horrid vision would make him ever afterwards afraid in the dark, however great a hero and warrior he might otherwise be. The best way to get rid of such hard customers was, to dig up the body, burn it to ashes, and scatter the ashes in the sea, or else to cut the head off the corpse and lay it between its legs.* Doubtless it was believed that the body was necessary to this class of the Dead, in order to make their appearance among the living; when their souls were deprived of this means of carrying on operations, they could no longer do any harm to men, but had to stay in their dwelling in Helheim.

We find mention of another way to get rid of troublesome apparitions, namely, to prosecute them with all legal formalities for the disturbance they occasioned, and to banish them by a regular sentence of law. The decree was posted upon the principal door of the house where the specters made their appearance. In the Eyrbyggja Saga, which is very rich in traces of the heathen superstitions, we find the description of a judicial process of this kind, which it seems was held on the estate of Froðá in Iceland, where a whole troop of ghosts had appeared every evening for a long time and scared the people of the house away from the fire, in order to get a seat by it themselves. The sentence of banishment, it is stated, was passed on each specter in particular, by expressly calling him by name, whereupon the ghost had to take his departure through the opposite door, however reluctant he might be to go.

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* Laxd. S.: Eyrb. S.: Grettis S. et al.

It was a consequence of their ideas of a future state, to bury with the dead in the grave, not only useful implements with which they could busy themselves when the spirit at night visited the home of the body and clothed itself for a season in the cast-off earthly form, but also gold and ornaments with which they could shine in the halls of Hel, or else splendid armor with which the spirit, which was never conceived of as being quite deprived of all bodily form, could make an honorable entrance into Valhalla. These treasures, which, when very rich, were thought to betray themselves by nocturnal fires which burned above the mounds (haugeldar), often allured bold men to break open and rob the graves. But these mound-breakers had to go prepared for a hard struggle with the inhabitant of the mound (haugbúi) or the ghost of the buried man, which was believed rarely to grant its treasures to any living being. They could never gain undisturbed possession of the treasures until they had succeeded in hewing off the head of the specter and laying it between its legs. But the great advantages promised by such a mound-breaking, induced them to close their eyes against the dangers of the undertaking, as well as the wrong which they doubtless believed there was in thus disturbing the repose of the dead. Many descriptions of terrible battles with these mound-spirits are found in the Sagas,* which contain a multitude of remarkable features of the ancient Northmen's belief in specters.

Another very ancient superstition may here be cited in conclusion, namely, the belief that men could be born again (vera endrbornir), that the spirit could pass from one body when it was dead, and enter another in order to be born anew with it. Thus it was believed that the hero Helgi Hjörvarðsson was born again in Helgi Hundingsbani, and Svafa, the favorite of the former, in the Valkyrja Sigrún, who was beloved by the latter. In like manner it was believed that Olaf the Saint was the re-born Olaf Geirstaða-Álf. Connected with this and likewise of heathen origin appears to have been the belief that two persons could have, in common, one man's life; and that both should therefore die at the same time.

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* Hörðs S. 14; Grettis S. 20.

CHAPTER XXVII.

INFLUENCE OF THE ASA-FAITH UPON THE NATIONAL SPIRIT OF THE NORTHMEN.

THAT the Asa-faith exercised a mighty influence over the character of all the nations who were its adherents, is manifest. As to the Northmen, it is only necessary, in confirmation hereof, to take a comparative view of the doctrines of that faith and of the popular life in heathendom, as portrayed by the Sagas. By this, however, we would not say that the popular character, individually and collectively, was created by that faith; that the virtues and vices of the people originated in it alone. In that case we might fancy that the Germanic nations, and especially the Norræna branch, had received the Asa-faith as a comparatively finished system of religion. But this would certainly be an incorrect view of the subject. This people, at its separation from a larger whole, took with it only the germs of that faith which afterward became developed in a peculiar direction, under the influence of the popular life and the action of external circumstances upon that life, but which also reacted upon that life with a power which increased in proportion as the system acquired by development a more decided character. In this we can perceive an active reciprocating influence between the religion and the popular life, analogous to that operating between the soul and the body.

When we find, for instance, that the doctrine of the Asa-faith concerning Odin as Val-father, Valhalla, and the Einherjar, contains a strong incentive to warlike deeds, we must not, therefore, imagine that the warlike spirit which displayed itself so powerfully among the Germanic tribes in general, and the Norræna in particular, had its origin in this doctrine precisely, or that this doctrine consequently forms any part of the real basis of the religion. Rather may we conceive that the inherent physical power of these tribes, set in activity by casual outward circumstances, by hostile conflicts with other tribes and intestine quarrels among themselves, called forth the warlike spirit from the beginning; that this spirit in turn stamped itself upon the religious doctrines, and finally, that the religion, after having received this characteristic impress, again reäcted to sustain and still further inflame that warlike spirit.

The influence of the Asa-faith upon the popular spirit of the Northmen must be regarded from quite another point of view than that of Christianity at a later period. The Asa-faith was, so to speak, inborn with this particular class of people and this particular nation, as it had developed itself from certain germs and taken form with the popular life itself, almost unknown to it. Christianity, on the contrary, was imparted to the people as a religious system complete in itself, appointed for all the nations of the earth; one which by its own divine power opened for itself a way to conviction, and through that operated on the popular spirit in a direction pointed out by the fundamental principles of the religion itself.

As the system of the Asa-faith arose without any conscious object to be effected in morals, therefore it did not embrace any actual code of morals, in the higher sense of the term. The Asa doctrine does not pronounce by positive expression what is virtue and what is vice; it pre-supposes a consciousness thereof in its votaries. It only represents in general terms Virtue as bringing its own reward, Vice its own punishment, if not here upon the earth, then with certainty beyond the grave. This is contained in the doctrines of Valhalla and Helheim, of Gimli and Náströnd. For the rest, the precepts relating to life which are propounded as divine in many of the heathen poems, especially in Hávamál and Sígrdrífumál of the Older Edda,* constitute a collection of prudential maxims rather than a system of morals. But these maxims, inasmuch as they were thought to proceed from the Gods, or from superior beings nearly related to the Gods, are combined with the Asa-faith, and express the ideas of a rational and worthy life which were developed among the Northmen under its influence.

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* In the Hávamál—which name signifies either the Sublime Discourses or the Discourse of the Sublime Being—Odin himself is represented as the speaker. In Sigrdrífumál it is the Valkyrja Sigrdrífa, who gives counsel to Sigurd Fafnisbani.

What these rules of life, which are uttered in apothegms, mainly inculcate, is briefly as follows:

The recognition of man's imperfection, which should challenge in him a struggle against his own evil propensities and forbearance toward the weakness of others.

"Vices and virtues are borne by the sons of men blended in the breast; no man is so good that his faults do not follow him; no one so bad that he is good for nothing."

Courage and strength, both in bearing the hard decrees of fate, and in fighting against enemies.

"The unwise man lies awake all night, and ponders over all things: then he is weary when the morning comes, yet his sorrow remains as it was."

"Silent and thoughtful should be the sons of princes, and bold in battle."

"The timid man thinks he shall live forever if he keeps away from battle; but age gives him no peace even though the spear may spare him."

The struggle for independence in life with regard to knowledge as well as fortune, an independence which should, therefore, be earned by a love of learning and by industry.

"A friend more trusty can no man ever have than a good understanding."

"Happy he who has law and understanding of himself while he lives; for evil counsel has been often found in the breast of another."

"One's own home is the best though little it may be; every man is master in his own house. Though he have but two goats and a cottage thatched with boughs, is it better than begging."

"A bleeding heart is his who has to beg his bread for every meal."

"Early shall he rise whose laborers are few, and see to his work; many things hinder him who sleeps away the morning. The half of riches depends on quickness."

A strict adherence to oaths and promises:

"This I counsel thee secondly, that thou swear not an oath unless it be true; cruel fetters shall bind the traitor; wretched is he who breaks his word."

Candor and fidelity as well as foresight in love; devotion to the tried friend, but dissimulation toward the false and war to the death against the implacable enemy.

"To thy friend shalt thou be a friend, to him and his friend; but no one should be the friend of his friend's enemy."

"Hast thou a friend in whom thou hast full confidence, and thou wilt receive good from him, then mingle thy thoughts with his, exchange gifts with him and visit him often."

"But hast thou another in whom thou hast not great confidence, and yet will receive good from him, fair words shalt thou speak to him but falsely think, and reward loose speech with lies."

"Never be the first to break off rashly with thy friend. Sorrow consumes the heart when thou hast no one to whom thou canst open thy whole mind."

"Make thy friend's misfortune thy own; but give thy enemy no peace."

"If thou wilt find a good wife, to be a pleasant companion and to bring thee joy, make fair promises but hold them in good faith; no one is made weary with good."

"Hast thou a friend in whom thou hast full confidence? go often to see him; for the weeds grow and the high grass in the path where no one treads."

"Once I was young; I traveled alone through wild paths; I thought myself rich when I met with others. Man is a joy to man."

"That is a communion of soul where each can say confidentially to the other all his thoughts. Anything is better than to be false. He is not a friend who speaks only fair words."

"Let no one trust the words of a maiden nor a woman's speech; for upon rolling wheels their hearts were formed, and inconstancy lies in their breast."

"Never rejoice at the misfortunes of others, but let their prosperity please thee."

Respect for Age.

"Laugh not at the gray-haired speaker. That is often good which the aged have to say. Often from the wrinkled skin come forth words of wisdom."

Hospitality, liberality, and charity to the poor.

"Fire is needed by him who has come in and is chilled at the knees; food and clothing are needed by the man who has wandered over the mountains."

"Water he needs who comes to thy table; a towel and a hospitable welcome. By good treatment thou shalt win from him good words and kindness in return."

"With arms and clothing shall friends gladden each other. They who give and receive gifts in return, are friends the longest, if all other things be well."

"With scorn and laughter mock not the stranger and the wayfarer. He who sits at his own door is often uncertain who it may be that comes by."

"Scoff not the guest nor spit upon him from the window! Be kind to the poor."

A prudent foresight in word and deed.

"The wary guest who comes to the banquet is not wasteful of words; he listens with the ear, he sees with the eye; thus the wise man feels about him."

"He talks too much who never ceases his vain flow of words. The flippant tongue, unless it be checked, often runs itself into mischief."

"From thy weapons on the field move not a footbreadth; for it is uncertain how soon upon the way out the spear may be needed."

Temperance, not only in the gratification of the senses, but in the exercise of power.

"No heavier burden is borne by man than immoderate drinking; nor is ale so good as it is said for the sons of men. The more one drinks the less he knows, until his understanding is gone."

"The bird of forgetfulness hovers over the drinking room and steals away the senses of men."

"The herd knows when to go home and it leaves the pasture; but the foolish man knows not the measure of his stomach."

"The gluttonous man, unless he makes use of his reason, eats his own death. To the Wise the stomach of the stupid man often brings laughter."

"His power the wise man shall wield with moderation! This he finds when among the brave he has come, that no one excels in everything."

Contentment and cheerfulness.

"Prudent and generous be the sons of the free-born, and bold in battle. Cheerful and glad let every man be to the end of his life."

"The heart only knows what dwells the heart nearest; it alone can betray itself. There is no disease worse for the brave man than to be discontented with his lot."

"The master of the house should be cheerful at home, kind to his guests and circumspect; let him be attentive and affable."

Modesty and politeness of intercourse.

"Thou shalt no maiden entice nor any man's wife, nor urge them to wantonness."

"The fool stares when he comes a guest; he talks with himself and murmurs. If he gets a drink his whole mind is opened."

"Washed and sated should a man ride to the assemblies, even though he be not finely dressed. Of his shoes and breeches let no one be ashamed, nor of his horse, though it may not be the best."

A desire to win the good will of our fellow men, especially to surround one's self with a steadfast circle of devoted kinsmen and faithful friends.

"The tree pines away which stands within the village; no bark nor leaf remains to shelter it. So is it with the man whom no one loves; why shall he live long?"

"Seldom stands a monumental stone by the wayside, unless by kinsman raised to kinsman."

"Bear thyself irreproachably toward thy kinsfolk; be slow to avenge thyself on them, even though they injure thee: this, it is said, will profit thee in death."

A careful treatment of the bodies of the dead.

"Carefully gather up the dead wherever on earth thou may find them, whether they have died by sickness, by the sea, or by arms. Raise up a mound for the departed, wash the hands and head, comb and dry it before it is laid in the coffin, and pray for it to sleep in peace."

The remembrance that earthly riches are perishable, and in connection therewith, the struggle to gain a good reputation and a renown which shall reach beyond this life and be cherished and honored by posterity.

"Wealth is like the glance of the eye, it is a most unstable friend."

"Riches depart, kindred die, man himself dies also; but a good name dies never for him who gained it."

"Riches depart, kindred die, man himself dies also; but one thing I know of which never dies: the Judgment of the Dead."

These rules of life were variously understood, and as variously carried out into practice. But on the whole we find them reflected in the popular character of the Northmen, such as history teaches it to us during heathendom. Bravery, prudence, and a love of independence are its bright features, although bravery often degenerated into warrior-fierceness, prudence into dissimulation, and the love of independence into self-will. If on the one hand we find a noble self-command, devoted faithfulness in friendship and love, noble-hearted hospitality and generosity, a love of right and of legal order, we also see on the other, unyielding stubbornness, a fierce spirit of revenge, a repulsive arrogance, a far-reaching self-interest and an excessive dependence upon the formalities of the law. A cold and unmoved exterior often concealed a soul torn by the bitterest grief, or stirred up by the wildest passions. A passionate outburst of joy, or of grief, was considered undignified. Few words, but energetic action, was esteemed in conduct, and complaint was silenced in order that vengeance could strike the more surely and heavily. Under a tranquil, indifferent mien were concealed the boldest and most deep-laid plans, and the real intentions first came to light in the decisive moment. On the whole there was certainly an impress of rigidity, insensibility, and self-goodness stamped upon the popular character; but this stamp was more upon the outside than in its innermost character, more the result of inordinate prudence than of an evil disposition; and through all its failings there shines forth a dignity of soul which ennobled power and held up glory in this life and in after-ages as the highest object of human undertakings.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DECLINE OF THE ASA-FAITH.

A HISTORICAL representation of the development of the Asa-Faith cannot be given. As its origin is enveloped in total darkness, so is the period of its highest glory unknown to us, and it is in fact only in its decline and fall that history reveals it to us as appearing in the popular life and acting upon it. We know not what revolutions and changes the system may possibly have undergone during the long course of centuries in which the faith was cherished by the Northmen, but that these changes were not wholly unimportant, and moreover, that the religion was very differently understood at different times—now with greater warmth and a more special reference to its deep fundamental ideas, now with more coldness and more immediately in reference to its external form, its symbolic dress—the very character of the religion leads us to presume.

The religion which draws man into reflective meditation, which, as it were, strives to separate him from the finite world in order to absorb him in the contemplation of the Infinite, can maintain itself through a long course of centuries with unimpaired power, even amid violent outward convulsions. But the Asa-faith was not such a religion. It is evident, on the contrary, that in the form under which we know it, it must of necessity draw its votaries into a life of activity, or rather, tear them almost involuntarily out into the wildest tumult of the world. History shows us also how the Germanic nations in earlier times, and afterward the Northmen, inflamed by this faith, developed a warlike power and boldness which shook Europe's former social fabric to its foundations—how great hosts of Northmen were driven by this faith to a Víking-life which knew no home, no rest, and but few of the milder feelings of humanity; and how the warlike spirit among them toward the close of heathendom blazed out with a wild ferocity which, as it were, consumed itself.

But in this agitated life, which the Asa-faith, although it did not, perhaps, call it forth from the first, yet did so strongly support, there lay an effective germ, not only of changes in the doctrines themselves, but more especially of revolutions in the religious opinions of its votaries—revolutions which, in the course of time, were, of necessity, to involve its decline and fall.

The Víking's life and uninterrupted warfare kept many of the chieftains and large troops of men the greater part of the time away from their homes and from the sanctuaries of the people, and made them by degrees foreign and indifferent to them, while they, at the same time, came in contact with people of another religion and other customs. Many returned to their homes with contempt at heart for the faith of their fathers, and as free-thinkers who had become accustomed to rely upon their own powers alone. For every new generation that grew up in that wild Víking-life the faith became more powerless and insignificant. They persisted in their warrior-ferocity from habit and by the force of example, but no longer directly impelled by a longing for the society of the Æsir and the joys of Valhalla. And though they did not yet give up the faith entirely, still it was only the exterior, the sensuous form, to which they paid attention. It was in idols and sacrifices, divination and sorcery, that they placed confidence, and it was the grossest superstition that formed the counterpart to the free-thinking. That wild life, agitated by all manner of passions, which also transferred itself to their homes, and toward the close of heathendom gained the ascendency everywhere in the North, could not be favorable to any well-regulated system of religion whatever, and the foundations of the Asa-faith were thus undermined by the very spirit which it had helped to awaken, and which it had itself strongly supported.

In this condition, then, we find the Asa-faith at the period when history first properly makes us acquainted with it—in its last stage of existence. It is free-thinking and abject superstition which we find here presented as the counterpart of each other. While the Northmen on one hand worshiped stick and stone, animals and dead men, and believed their idols to find sustenance in bloody sacrifices, even of human beings, there were many, on the other hand, who lived without God and thoughtlessly put their whole trust in their own power and strength. There were some, indeed, who thought more deeply. They rejected a plurality of Gods and put their trust in one only Supreme Being, "in Him who created the Sun and all things that have a being." In this Supreme Being the first sovereign king of Norway, Harald Hárfagri, professed to believe.* The Icelandic chieftain Thorkel Máni in his last sickness requested to be carried into the rays of the Sun, where he commended his soul to the God who created the Sun. "And he had led as virtuous a life as the best Christian."† The Icelander Thorstein Ingemundsson said to his brothers, that their departed father would certainly enjoy a blissful reward for his piety "with Him who created the Sun and all the world, whoever He may be;" and this same Being, whom he regarded as "the Mightiest," he called upon to deliver his brothers from the Berserksgang.‡ The Asa doctrine itself, with its not indistinct presentiments of a Being higher than all Æsir, might awaken such conceptions in the pious and contemplative mind who felt disgusted with the gross superstition of the times, and yet was not willing to give up every consolation of Religion. But these few individuals could not contribute anything to support the Asa-faith, now tottering to its fall; on the contrary it was they who left it the most hastily when they became acquainted with Christianity.

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* Snor.: Har. Hárf. S. 4.

† Landnmb. I. 9.

‡ Vatnsd. S. 23, 37, 46.

It was of no avail that the zealous Asa-worshipers portrayed the calamities which could strike one or another of these free-thinkers as a punishment because he did not bestow upon the Gods that worship due unto them. Nor did it avail any more that they disclaimed that toleration of other believers, which otherwise appears to have been a characteristic of the votaries of the Asa-doctrine, and sharpened the severity of the laws against those who showed disrespect toward the Gods. At the time when Christianity was approaching the North, the Asa-faith no longer satisfied the more deep-thinking portion of the people who were nominally its adherents, and, therefore, it could not long sustain a conflict with the new faith, when that faith came to be promulgated with zeal and energy.

APPENDIX.

Text to various translations from the Older Edda on the foregoing pages.

On page 121.

Völuspá, *strophe* 20.

þær lög lögðu,
þær lif kuru
alda börnum,
orlög seggja.

On page 166.

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II., *str.* 32.

Ær ertu, systir!
ok ervita,
er þú bræðr þínum
biðr forskapa;
einn veldr Óðinn
öllu bölvi,
þvíat með sifjungum
sakrúnar bar.

On page 188.

Atlamal, *str.* 19.

Orn hugða ek hér inn fljúga
at endlöngu húsi,
þat mun oss drjúgt deilask;
dreifði hann oss öll blóði,
hugða ek af heitum
at væri hamr Atla.

On page 206.

Hyndluljóð, *str.* 10.

Hörg hann mér gerði
hlaðinn steinum,
—nú er grjót þat
at gleri vorðit—
rauð hann i nýju
nauta blóði,
æ trúði Óttar
á ásynjur.

On page 240.

Völundarkviða, *str.* 31.

Eiða skaltu mér áðr
alla vinna,
at skips borði
ok at skjaldar rönd,
at mars bægi
ok at mækis egg:
at þú kveljat
kván Völundar,
né brúði minni
at bana verðir.

On page 240.

Helgakv. Hundingsb. II., *str.* 29.

þik skyli allir
eiðar bíta,
þeir er Helga
hafðir unna;
at enu ljósa
leiptrar vatni,
ok at úrsvölum
unnar steini.

ON PAGE 241.

Atlakviða, *str.* 30.

Svá gangi þér, Atli!
sem þú við Gunnar áttir
eiða opt um svarða
ok ár of nefnda,
at sól inni suðrhöllu
ok at Sigtýs bergi,
hulkvi hvílbeðjar,
ok at hringi Ullar.

ON PAGE 241.

Atlamál, *str.* 31.

Sór þá Vingi,
sér réð hann lítt eira:
"eigi hann jötnar,
ef hann at yðr lygi,
gálgi görvallan,
ef hann á grið hygði."

ON PAGE 311.

Hávamál, *str.* 134.

Löstu ok kosti
bera ljóða synir
blandna brjóstum í;
erat maðr svá góðr
at galli ne fylgi,
né svá illr at einugi dugi.

Ib. *str.* 22.

Ósviðr maðr vakir
um allar nætr
ok hyggr at hvívetna;
þá er móðr
er at morni kemr,
alt er víl sem var.

Ib. *str.* 14.

Þagalt ok hugalt
skyli þjóðans barn
ok vígdjarft vera.

Ib. *str.* 15.

Ósnjallr maðr
hyggsk munu ey lifa,
ef hann við víg varask;
enn elli gefr
hánum engi frið,
þótt hánum geirar gefi.

Ib. *str.* 6.

* * * óbrigðra vin
fær maðr aldregi
en manvit mikit.

Ib. *str.* 9.

Sá er sæll
er sjálfr um á
lof ok vit meðan lifir;
þvíat ill ráð hefir
maðr opt þegit
annars brjóstum or.

Ib. *str.* 35.

Bú er betra,
þótt lítit sé,
halr er heima hverr;
þótt tvær geitr eigi
ok taugreptan sal,
þat er þó betra en bœn.

ON PAGE 312.

Hávamál, *str.* 36.

Bú er betra,
þótt lítit sé,
halr er heima hverr;
blóðugt er hjarta
þeim er biðja skal
sér í mál hvert matar.

Ib. *str.* 58.

Ár skal rísa
sá er á yrkendr fá,
ok ganga síns verka á vit;
mart um dvelr þann
er um morgin sefr,
hálfr er auðr und hvötum.

Sigrdrífumál, *str.* 23.

Þat ræð ek þér annat,
at þú eið ne sverir
nemr þann er saðr sé;
grimmar simar
ganga at trygðrofi,
armr er vára vargr.

Hávamál, *str.* 42.

Vin sínum skal
maðr vinr vera,
þeim ok þess vin;
en ovinar síns
skyli engi maðr
vinar vinr vera.

Ib. *str.* 43.

Veiztu ef þú vin átt,
þann er þu vel trúir,
ok vill þú af hánum gott geta?
geði skaltu við þann blanda
ok gjöfum skipta,
fara at finna opt.

Ib. *str.* 44.

Ef þú átt annan,
þanns þú illa trúir,
vildu af hánum þó gott geta;
fagrt skaltu við þann mæla,
enn flátt hyggja,
ok gjalda lausung við lygi.

Ib. *str.* 122.

Vin þínum
ver þú aldregi
fyrri at flaumslitum;
sorg etr hjarta,
ef þú segja ne náir
einhverjum allan hug.

Ib. *str.* 128.

Hvars þú böl kant
kveð þú þér bölvi at,
ok gefat þínum fjándum frið.

Ib. *str.* 131.

Ef þú vilt þér góda konu
kveðja at gamanrúnum,
ok fá fögnuð af;
fögru skaldu heita,
ok láta fast vera,
leiðisk mangi gott ef getr.

ON PAGE 313.

Hávamál, *str.* 120.

Veiztu ef þú vin átt,
þánns þú vel trúir,
farðu at finna opt;
þvíat hrísi vex
ok hávu grasi
vegi, er vætki treðr.

Ib. *str.* 46.

Ungr var ek forðum,
fór ek einn saman,
þá varð ek villr vega;
auðigr þóttumk,
er ek annan fann:
maðr er manna gaman.

Ib. *str.* 125.

Sifjum er þá blandat,
hverr er segjr ræðr
einum allan hug;
alt er betra
en sé brigðum at vera
era sa vinr öðrum er vilt eitt segir.

Ib. *str.* 83.

Meyjar orðum
skyli manngi trúa,
né því er kveðr kona;
þvíat á hverfanda hveli
váru þeim hjörtu sköpuð,
brigð í brjóst um lagit.

Ib. *str.* 129.

Illu feginn
ver þú aldregi,
enn lát þér at góðu getið.

Ib. *str.* 135.

At hárum þul
hlæ þú aldregi,
opt er gott þat er gamlir kveða;
opt or skörpum belg
skilin orð koma.

Ib. *str.* 3.

Elds er þörf
þeims inn er kominn
ok á knè kalinn;
Matar ok váða
er manni þörf,
þeim er hefir um fjall farið.

Ib. *str.* 4.

Vatns er þörf
þeim er til verðar kemr,
þerru ok þjóðlaðar,
góðs um æðis,
ef sér geta mætti
orðs ok endrþögu.

ON PAGE 314.

Ib. *str.* 40.

Vápnum ok váðum
skolu vinir gleðjask,
þat er á sjálfum sýnst;
viðrgefendr ok endrgefendr
erusk lengst vinir,
ef þat bíðr at verða vel.

Ib. *str.* 133.

At háði né hlátri
hafðu aldregi
gest né ganganda;
opt vitu ógörla
þeir er sitja inni fyrir,
hvers þeir 'ro kyns er koma.

Ib. *str.* 136.

Gest þú ne geyja
né á grind hrækir
get þú váluðum vel.

Ib. *str.* 7.

Enn vari gestr
er til verðar kemr
þunnu hljóði þegir;
eyrum hlyðir
en augum skoðar;
svá nýsisk fróðra hverr fyrir.

Ib. *str.* 28.

Ærna mælir
sá er æva þegir
staðlausu stan;
hraðmælt tunga,
nema haldendr eigi,
opt sér ógott um gelr.

Ib. *str.* 37.

Vápnum sínum
skala maðr velli á
feti ganga framar;
þvíat óvíst er at vita,
nær verðr á vegum úti
geirs um þörf guma.

Ib. *str.* 11.

Vegnest verra
vegra hann velli at,
en sé ofdrykkja öls;
era svá gott,
sem gott kveða,
öl alda sona:
þvíat færa veit
er fleira drekkr
síns til geðs gumi.

Ib. *str.* 12.

Óminnis hegri heitir
sá er yfir ölðrum þrumir,
hann stelr geði guma.

Ib. *str.* 20.

Hjarðir þat vitu,
nær þær heim skolu,
ok ganga þá af grasi,
en ósviðr maðr
kann ævagi
síns um máls maga.

Ib. *str.* 19.

Gráðugr halr,
nema geðs viti,
etr sér aldrtrega;
opt fær hlægis,
er með horskum kemr,
Manni heimskum magi.

ON PAGE 315.

Ib. *str.* 63.

Ríki sitt skyli
ráðsnotra hverr
í hófi hafa;
þá hann þat finnr,
er með fræknum kemr,
at engi er einna hvatastr.

Ib. *str.* 14.

þagalt ok hugalt
skyli þjóðans barn

ok vígdjarft vera;
glaðr ok reifr
skyli gumna hverr
unz sinn bíðr bana.

Ib. *str.* 94.

Hugr einn þat veit,
er býr hjarta nær,
einn er hann sér um seva;
öng er sótt verri
hveim snotrum manni
en sér öngu at una.

Ib. *str.* 102.

Heima glaðr gumi
ok við gesti reifr
sviðr skal um sik vera;
minnigr ok málugr.

Sigrdrífumál, *str.* 32.

Mey þú teygjat
né manns konu
né eggja ofgamans.

Hávamál, *str.* 16.

Kópir afglapi,
er til kynnis kemr,
þylsk hann um eða þrumir;
alt er senn
ef han sylg um getr,
uppi er þá geð guma.

Ib. *str.* 60.

þveginn ok mettr
ríði maðr þíngi at,
þótt hann séð væddr til vel;
skúa ok bróka
skammisk engi maðr,
né hests in heldr,
þótt hann hafit góðan.

Ib. *str.* 49.

Hrörnar þöll
sú er stendr þorpi á,
hlýrat henni börkr né barr;
svá er maðr sá
er manngi ann,
hvat skal hann lengi lífa?

Ib. *str.* 71.

Sjaldan bautarsteinar
standa brautu nær,
nema reisi niðr at nið.

On page 316.

Sigrdrífumál, *str.* 22.

þat ræð ek þér ið fyrsta,
at þú við frændr þína
vammalaust verir;
síðr þú hefnir,
þótt þeir sakar göri,
þat kveða dauðum duga.

Ib. *str.* 33.

þat ræð ek þér it níunda,
at þú nám bjargir,
hvars þú á földu finnr;
hvárt eru sóttdauðir
eða sædauðir,
eða 'ro vápndauðir verar.

34. Haug skal göra
hveim er liðinn er,
hendr þvá ok höfuð;
kemba ok þerra,
áðr í kistu fari,
ok biðja sælin sofa.

Hávamál, *str.* 77.

Svá er auðr
sem augabragð,
hann er valtastr vina.

Ib. *str.* 75.

Deyr fé,
deyja frændr,
deyr sjálfr it sama;
en orðstírr
deyr aldregi,
hveim er sér góðan getr.

Ib. *str.* 76.

Deyr fé,
deyja frændr,
deyr sjálfr it sama;
ek veit einn
at aldri deyr:
dómr um dauðan hvern.

EXTRACT FROM EGIL'S SAGA,

Chap. 68, quoted on pp. 242–245.

Egill drap Ljót hinn Bleikna.

ÞEIR Þórsteinn ok Egill bjuggu ferð sína þegar þeir höfðu lókit erendum sínum, fara þeir þá aptr á leið, ok er þeir koma suðr um Dofra-fjall þá segir Egill at hann vill fara ofan til Raumsdals ok siðan suðr sunda leið: "Vil ek," segir hann, "lúka erendum mínum í Sogni ok á Hörðalandi, þvíat ek vil búa skip mitt í sumar til Íslands út." Þórsteinn bað hann ráða ferð sinni; skiljast þeir Þórsteinn ok Egill, fór Þórsteinn suðr um Dali ok alla leið til þess er hann kom til búa sinna. * * * Egill fór leiðar sinnar ok þeir xij. saman, komu þeir fram í Raumsdal, fíngu sèr þá flutníngar; fóru siðan suðr á Mæri; er ekki sagt frá ferð þeirra fyrir enn þeir komu í ey þá er Hauð heitir, ok fóru til gistingar á bæ þann er heitir á Blindheimi, þat var göfugr bærr. Þar bjó lendr-maðr er Friðgeir het; hann var úngr at aldri, hafði nýtekit vit föðrarsi sínum. Móðir hans het Gyða, hón var systir Arinbjarnar hersis, skörúngr mikill ok göfug kona; hón var at rauðum með syni sínum Friðgeiri, höfðu þau þar rausnar-bú mikit.

þá fengu þeir allgóðar viðtökur, sat Egill um kveldit it næsta Friðgeiri ok förunautar hans þar útar frá; var þar drykkja mikil ok dýrlig veizla. Gyða húsfreyja gekk um kveldit til tals við Egil; hon spurði at Arinbirni bróðr sínum ok enn at fleirum frændum sínum ok vinum þeim er til Englands höfðu farit með Arinbirni; Egill sagði henni þat sem hón spurði. Hón spurði hvat til tiðenda hefði gjörast í ferðum Egils. Han segir henni af ljósasta; þá kvað hann:

“Urðumst leið in ljóta
Landbeiðaðar reiði
Sígrat gaukr ef Glamma
Gamma veit um sik þramma.”

Egill var alkátr um kveldit, enn Friðgeir ok heimamenn voru heldr hljóðr. Egill sá þar mey fagra ok vel búna, honum var sagt at hón var systir Friðgeirs; mærinn var ókát ok gret einart um kveldit, þat þótti þeim undarligt þar voru þeir um nóttina. En um morgininn var veðr hvast ok eigi sæfært, þar þurftu þeir far or eyjunni. þá gekk Friðgeir ok bæði þau honum þar at sitja með förunauta sína til þess er gott veri færi-veðr ok hafa þaðan fara-beina þann sem þeir þyrfti. Egill þektist þat, sátu þeir þar veðr-festir iij. nætr ok var þar hinn mesti mannfagnaðr. Eptir gerðu veðr lygnt, stóðu þeir Egill þá upp snemma um morgininn ok bjuggust, gingu þá til matar ok var þeim gefit öl at drekka, ok sátu þeir um hríð; síðan tóku þeir klæði sin. Egill stóð upp ok þakkaði bónda ok húsfreyju beina sinn, ok gengu síðan út; bóndi ok móðir hans gengu á gautu með þeim. Þa gekk Gyða til máls við Friðgeir son sinn ok talaði við hann lagt; Egill stóð meðan ok beið þeirra. Egill mællti við meyna: "Hvat grætr þú mær? ek se þik aldri káta." Hón mátti engu svara, ok gret at meirr. Friðgeir segir at móður sinni hátt: "ekki vil ek nú biðja þess; þeir eru nú búnir ferðar sinnar. Þá gekk Gyða at Egli ok mællti: "ek mun segja þèr, Egill, tiðendi, þau sem hèr eru með oss. Maðr heitir Ljótr *hinn bleiki*, hann er berserkr ok hólmgöngu-maðr, hann er óþokku-sæll; hann kom hèr ok bað dóttur minnar, en vèr svöruðum honum skjótt ok synjuðum honum ráðsins. Síðan skoraði hann til hólmgöngu á Friðgeir son minn, ok skal á morginn koma til hólmsins í ey þá er Vorl heitir. Nú vilda ek, Egill, at þú færir til hólmsins með Friðgeiri; mundi þat sannast ef Arinbjörn veri hèr i landi at vèr mundim eigi þola ofríki slíkum manni sem Ljótr er." Egill segir, "skylt er þat, húsfreyja, fyri sakir Arinbjarnar frænda þins at ek fara, ef honum þikir sèr þat nokkut fulltíng." "Þá gerir þú vel," segir Gyða; "skulu vèr þá gánga inn í stufu ok vera öll saman daglángt." Gánga þeir Egil þá inn í stufu, ok drukku, sátu þeir þar um daginn. En at kveldi komu vinir Friðgeirs þeir er til ferðar voru ráðnir með honum, ok var þar fjölment um nóttina, ok var þar þá veizla mikil. En eptir um daginn bjóst Friðgeir til ferðar ok mart manna með honum; var þar Egil í för. Þá var gott færi-veðr; fara þeir síðan ok koma í eyna;

þar var fagr völlr skamt frá sjónum er hólmstefnan skyldi vera, var þar markaðr hólmstaðr, lagðir steinar í hríng utan um. Nú kom þar Ljótr með lið sitt; bjózt hann þá til hólmgöngu; hann hafði skjöld ok sverð. Ljótr var allmikil maðr ok sterkligr, ok er hann gekk fram á völlinn at holmstaðnum þá kom á hann berserksgángr; tók hann at grenja íllíliga ok beit í sköld sinn. Friðgeir var ekki mikill, grannligr ok friðr sjónum, ok ekki staðit í barðögum. En er Egill sá Ljót þá kvað hann vísu:

"Era Friðgeiri færi
(Faurum motst á vit sörvar,
Skolum banna mjög manni
Mey) aurleygi at heyja
Vit þann er bítr ok blótar
Bönd el-hvötuð Göndlar
Al-feigum skýtr ægir
Augum skjöld á baugi."

Ljótr sá hvar Egill stóð, ok heyrði orð hans; hann mælti: "gákk híg at hinn mikli maðr á hólminn, ok berzt vit mik ef þú ert allfúss til! er þat miklu jafnligra enn ek berjumst vit Friðgeir, þvíat ek þikjumst eigi at meiri maðr þó at ek leggi hann at jörðu. Þá kvað Egill:

"Erat lítillar Ljóti
Leik ek við hal bleikan,
Við bifteini bænar
Brynju rètt synja.
Búumst til vigs! en vægðar
Ván letka ek hanum.
Skapa verðum við skjaldi
Skæru, drengr, á mæri."

Síðan bjóst Egill til hólmgöngu við Ljót. Egill hafði skjöld þann sem hann var vanr at hafa, en hann var gyrðr sverði því er hann kallaði *Naðr*, en hann hafði *Dragvandil* í hendi. Hann gekk inn yfir mark þat er hólmstefnan skyldi vera; en Ljótr var þar eigi búinn. Egill skók sverðit ok kvað visu:

> "Höggum hjalt-vönd skygðum;
> Hæfum rönd með brandi;
> Reynum rauðar máni;
> Rjóðum sverð í blóði.
> Stýfum Ljót af lífi;
> Leikum sárt við bleikan;
> Kyrrum kappa errinn
> (Komi auru á hræ) járnum."

Þá kom Ljótr fram á vígvöllinn ok segir upp-hólmgöngulög, "at sá skal bera níðings-nafn jafnan siðan er út hopar um marksteina þá er upp eru settir í hríng um hólmgöngu staðinn;" siðan rennast þeir at, ok höggr Egill til Ljótr brá við skildinum. En Egill hjó hvert högg at öðru svá at Ljótr fekk ekki höggit í móti. Hann hopaði undan til höggrúmsins, en Egill fór jamskjótt eptir ok hjó sem ákafast. Ljótr fór út um marksteinana ok víða um völlinn; gekk svá hin fyrsta hríð. Þá beiðist Ljótr hvílðar. Egill let þat ok vera; nema þeir þá stað, ok hvílðu sik. Þá kvað Egill:

> "Fyri þiki mer fura
> Flein stökkvandi nökkvat
> (Hræðist bödda beiðir?)
> Happlauss fura kappi.
> Vegrat fast sá er frestar
> Flein-döggvar stafr höggum.
> Vábeyðan fór viðan
> Völl fyri rotnum skalla."

Þat voru hólmgöngulög í þann tíma, at sá er skorar á mann annan til einshvers hlutar, ok fengi sá sígr er áskoraði, þá skyldi sá hafa sígrmál þat er hann hafði til skorað; en ef hann fengi ósígr, þa skyldi hann leysa sik þvílíka fè sem ákveðit veri; en ef hann felli á hólmi, þá hafði hann fyrirgjört allri eigu sinni, ok skyldi sá taka arf er hann felldi á hólmi. Egill bað at Ljótr skyldi búinn verða: "vil ek at við reynim nú hólmgöngu þessa." Ljótr spratt þá skjótt á fætr. Þá hljóp Egill at honum ok hjó þegar til hans, gekk hann þá svá nær honum at hann hraukk fyrir ok bar þá skjöldinn af honum. Þa hjó Egill til Ljóts ok kom á fyrir ofan knè, ok tók af fótinn; fell Ljótr þar ok þegar erendr. Þá gekk Egill þar til er þeir Friðgeir voru; var þetta verk honum allvel þakkat. Þá kvað Egill:

"Fell sá er flest hit ílla
(Fót hjó skáld af Ljóti),
Ulfgrennir hefir unnit;
Eir veittag Friðgeiri.
Sekja ek lóns til launa
Log brjótanda í móti;
Jafnt var mèr í gný geira
Gamanleikr við hal bleikan."

Ljótr var lítt harmðandi af mönnum, þvíat hann hafði verit hinn mesti óeiru-maðr. Hann var Svænskr at ætt ok átti engva frændr þar í landi; hann hafði komit þangat ok aflat sèr fjár á hólmgongum. Hann hafði fellt marga góða bændr ok skorat áðr á þá til hólmgöngu ok til jarða þeirra ok óðala, ok var þá vorðinn stórauðigr bæði at löndum ok lausum aurum.

Egill fór heim með Friðgeiri af hólmstefnunni, dvaldist hann þar þá litta hríð áðr hann fór suðr á Mæri; skyldust þeir Egill ok Friðgeir með miklum kærleik, bauð Egill Friðgeiri um at heimta jarðir þær er Ljótr hafði átt.

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INDEX.

Adam of Bremen, a historian of the 12th century, 14—alludes to America, 80—to the temple at Upsala, 175, 198, 211.
Adelung, 30.
Adils, a king of Upsala, 185.
Afzelius, 32.
Al-faðir (Oðinn), 90, 93, 112, 127.
Álfar (Elves), 179, 193-5.
Álfheimr, the abode of Frey, 95, 134, 139—the home of the Light Elves, 123, 134.
Alfrek, a king of Horðaland, 178.
Alvísmál, an Eddaic poem, 47—quoted 299.
Ammianus Marcellinus, quoted, 282.
Angrboða, 98, 143.
Antiquarian researches in Iceland, 14, 15;—by Arngrim and Brynjúlf, 16, 17;—by Torfæus, 17, 18;—by Arnas Magnæus, 17, 22, 23;—by the Danish Government, 18; — by the Swedes, 18, 19.
Antiquarians of Germany, 29, 30;—of Norway, 37;—of Sweden, 19, 37.
Antiquaries, the Royal Society of Northern, 33, 37, 38, 39, 77.
Antiquitates Americanæ, 39, 77.
Apparitions, belief in, 303–305.
Aptrganga (see Apparitions), 303.
Arna-Magnæan Commission, 23, 32, 34.
Arnas Magnæus, 18—collects a large quantity of old MSS., and lays the foundation of the Arna-Magnæan Commission, 22–3.
Arngrímr Jónsson, finder of the Edda, 16, 17, 56.
Arnkiel's Cimbrian Mythology, 29.
Aron Hjörleifsson's Saga, 71.
Arwidsson, 37.
Ásgarðr, the abode of the gods, 93, 122;—the earthly, 107, 159.
Ash, the, a sacred tree, from which the first human pair were formed, 91, 115.
Askr, the first man, 91, 115.
Ásynjur, the Goddesses, 96, 126;—worship of, 177, 178.
Atlakviða, an Eddaic poem, 54;—quoted, 241.
Atlamal, an Eddaic poem, 54;—quoted, 183, 188, 241.
Atlantica of Rudbeck, traces the legends and learning of the Greeks to Scandinavia, 19, 20.
Atli, 51, 53, 54, 188, 241.
Attila (Atli), 51.
Auðhumla, the mythic cow, representing the elementary principle of material life, 89, 111, 112;—traces of its worship, 232.
Austri (the East), one of the four dwarves which support the sky, 91.

Baldur, 94, 135, 145;—his death, 99, 144; — return from the realms of death, 103, 152;—poems relating to, 28, 44, 45;—worship of, 176; statues of, 199.
Bardic School, in Germany, 30.

Bartholin's Antiquities, 18;—translated, 29.
Bergrísar (mountain giants), 89, 111, 113.
Berserkir, 253.
Bifröst, the Rainbow, the bridge from earth to heaven, 90, 95, 114.
Biographical Sagas, 67–72.
Bjarni Herjúlfsson, first discoverer of America, 78, 79.
Boar, the, sacred to Frey, 95, 134, 176.
Bragarfulli, the full horn, sacred to Bragi, *note*, 176, 177.
Bragarræðr, second part of the Later Edda, containing mythological ideas, 57.
Bragi, the god of Poetry, 95, 135;—worship of, 177.
Breiðablik, the dwelling of Baldur, 94, 144.
Breiðafjörðr, a firth in western Iceland, 71, 192, 207.
Brynjúlf Sveinsson, discoverer of the poetic Edda, 16, 17, 42, 56.
Buri, Burr, Bör, 89, 112.

Calendar, based on the Asa Mythology, by Finn Magnusen, *note*, 140.
Cat, the, sacred to Freyja, 96, 135.
Chronicles of the Danish Kings first published, 15.
Classes, different, mythic origin of, 49, 50.
Cold, the symbol of evil, 89, 110, 116.
Cottle's translation of the Edda, 40.
Cow, the, worship of, 231, 232.
Creation, 44;—of chaotic matter, 89, 111, 154;—of the world, 90, 112, 113, 154;—of the sun, moon and stars, 90, 91, 114.
Creutzer's Symbolik, 34.
Criticism in mythological studies, 22, 25–6, 31–2.
Dalin's History of Sweden, 27.
Delius, against the Edda, 30.
Dellingr, the dawn, the father of Day, 90, 114.
Denis' 'Songs' and translations, 30.
Díar, Gods, 127;—priests of ancient Ásgard who accompanied Odin into the North, 159.
Dísir, inferior goddesses, 127, 179, 181;—sacrifices, 184–5.
Dökkálfar (dark elves), 193.
Dragons, 302.
Draumkonur, 179.
Dreams, 188, 293–4.
Droplauga-sonar Saga, quoted, 255.
Dróttnar, rulers and priests in the earliest ages, 159–160.
Dualism, pervades the Old-Norse religion, 89, 110–116, 118, 154–5.
Dvergar (dwarves), origin of, 90, 114;—belief in, 299.

Edda, the Older, 42–56, 86;—discovery of, 17, 19;—Resenius' edition, 17, 24;—Arna Magnæan ed., 23;—German translations, 29, 30, 40.
Edda, the Later, 56–58, 86;—discovery of, 16, 17;—publication and translation, 17, 25, 29, 37, 40.
Egil Skallagrimsson (*see* Egil's Saga).
Egil's Saga, 69;—quoted, 173, 190–1, 242–5, 246–8, 265–6.
Eichhof's 'Literature of the North,' 40.
Einherjar, fallen heroes chosen for Valhalla, 93, 128.
Einar Eyjólfsson's dream, 188.
Einvígi, 242, 248, 250–1.
Eiríkr Blóðöx, a king of Norway, 173, 185, 190–1, 246.
Eiríkr Rauði, visited and colonized Greenland, 78;—extract from his Saga, 288–292.

Eiríkr Sigrsæli, protected by Odin, 172;—gave himself to the god and conquered by his aid, 168, 226.
Eiríksson, a learned Icelander, 23;—assists Mallet, 24;—his writings, 28.
Elves, 193;—sacrifices to them, 194–5.
Embla, the first woman, 91, 115.
Enthusiasm of Antiquaries, 15–19, 21.
Epic poems of the Edda, 50–55.
Evald, a Danish poet, 28.
Eyjafjörðr, a firth in the north of Iceland, 174, 188, 192, 238.
Eyrbyggja Saga, 40, 70–71;—quoted, 204, 207–8, 212–13, 225, 295–6, 306.

Fenrisúlfr, a mythic monster, 98, 143, 148;—bound by the Æsir, 99;—breaks loose at the end of the world and fights against the Gods, 101; — swallows Odin and is slain by Viðarr, 102.
Fensalir, the abode of Friga, 96, 129.
Figure-heads on the prow of ships forbidden by the Old-Icelandic laws, 190.
Finnr Jónsson's Ecclesiastical History of Iceland, 28.
Finnr Magnusen, a learned Icelander, works, 35, 36, mythologic calendar, 87;—reference, *note* 189.
Finngálkn, a supernatural monster of the north, 300, 301–2.
Finns, the, skilled in magic, 273, 276–7, and in the Future, 287.
Fjórðungr, a division of Iceland, a fourth or quarter, 160, 214, 234.
Fjölsvinnsmál, an Eddaic poem, 48.
Fjörgyn, the mother of Friga, 93, 129.
Flateyjabók, first Icelandic edition printed, 25.
Flóamanna Saga, quoted, 252–3.
Fólkvangar, the abode of Freyja, 96, 134, 139, 149.
Forseti, the god of Justice, 96, 137, 139, worshiped by the Frisians in a temple on Helgoland, 177.
Fostbræðra Saga, 70;—quoted, 200.
Freki, one of Odin's wolves, 93, 128.
Freyja, the goddess of Love, 96, 133, 134–5;—worship of, 177–8;—statues, 199.
Freyr, the god of Fruitfulness, 95, 133, 134;—worship of, 173, 176;—temples and sacrifices 173–5;—statues, 198–200.
Friðþjóf's Saga, 63; — quoted, 176, 184–5, 209.
Friga, the wife of Odin, 93, 96, 99;—worship of, 177–8;—statues, 199.
Frisians, the, worshiped Forseti, 177.
Frost-giants, 89, 90, 111.
Fundinn Noregr, 60;—quoted, 224.
Future rewards and punishments, 148–150, 152.
Future state, the, employments in, 306.
Fylgjur, attending spirits, 179;—gave to men their peculiar qualities, 187–8;—manifestations, 188–9.
Fylki, in ancient Norway, a small district ruled by a petty king, 215.
Færeyinga Saga, 67;—quoted, 226–7, 275–6.

Gardar, a Dane, first discovered Iceland, 77.
Gaungu-Hrólf's Saga, quoted, 194–5.
Gautrek's Saga, 224.

Gerða, the wife of Frey, 48, 95, 134.
Geri, one of Odin's wolves, 93, 128.
Gerstenberg's 'Letters' and poems, 30.
Geijer (E. G.), 35, 87; quoted, 160.
Giants or Demons, 297–9.
Gimli, the highest heaven, 93, 103, 122, 148, 152.
Ginungagap, 89, 90, 111.
Gísli Sursson's Saga, quoted, 174, 182.
Gjallarhorn, 95, 102.
Glitnir, the abode of Forseti, 96, 137, 139.
Gods, the, impersonations of the powers of nature, 125;—their various titles, 126–7.
Goðar, priests and teachers of religion, 160-3.
Görre's 'Mythic History,' 34.
Gräter, 30.
Greenland discovered and colonized, 78.
Grettis Saga, 71.
Grimm (J.), 39, 40, 85, 87; quoted, 177; and in notes to Part Second, *passim*.
Grimnismál, 43; quoted, 183.
Groa (1), an enchantress of the Edda, 55, 264;—(2), a sorceress in Iceland, 180.
Grótta-söngr, an Eddaic poem, 55.
Grougalldr, an Eddaic poem, 55.
Groves, worshiped, 233, 234.
Grundtvig (N. F. S.), 'Mythology of the North,' 35, 87.
Guðbrandr, a celebrated chieftain of Guðbrandsdal in Norway, 199, 201–2.
Guðbrandsdal, a large and fertile valley of central Norway, 170, 186, 198, 199, 201–2.
Guðrúnarkviða I. II. III., Eddaic poems, 53; III. quoted, 261–2.
Guðrúnarhvaut, an Eddaic poem, 54.
Gullinbursti, the golden bristled boar of Frey, 95, 134, 176.
Gunnbjörn, the discoverer of Greenland, 78.
Gunnhilda, a sorceress, Queen of king Eirík Blóðöx, 173, 185, 190–1, 272–3;—taught by the Finns, 277.
Gunnlaug Ormstúnga's Saga, 69, quoted, 171–2.
Gunnar Helming, an imposter, 175.
Gyðja, a priestess, 163.
Gygar, giantesses, 297.
Gylfaginning, the mythological book of the Later Edda, 56–7.
Gymir (see Ægir), 97, 138.

Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, a King of Norway, 171, 242.
Hákon Eiríksson Jarl, a king of Norway, overcomes the Jómsvíkingar, 73;—quoted, 149;—his devotion to the Gods made the country prosperous, 162;—anecdote of his religious zeal and bravery, 166;—sacrificed his son to his tutelary deity and gains her assistance in battle, 186, 222;—his temples to her 199, 201–2;—asks a favor of her, 226–7;—response to his sacrifice, 166, 280;—his gift to Einar, 284.
Hákonarmál, a poem, quoted, 148.
Hálf's Saga, 60, 61; quoted, 178, 182–3.
Hálfdán, a son of king Bele, in Norway, 184.
Hálfdán Einarsson's 'Icelandic History,' 28.
Hallfreðr Vandræðaskáld, 178; 180, 227.
Halogaland, a province of Norway, 185–6, 233.
Hamarsheimt, an Eddaic poem, 46.
Hamingjar, a class of inferior goddesses, 179, 180, 183.

Hammerich (M.), 'Concerning the myths of Ragnarökk and their significance in the Old-Northern Religion,' 87.

Harald Hárfagri, first king over all Norway, 200, 257, 267–8; Saga quoted, 272–3, 321.

Harald Gormsson, a king of Denmark, sends a sorcerer-spy to Iceland, 192.

Harald Hyldatand, a king of Denmark, consecrated to Odin, 168.

Harbarðsljóð, an Eddaic poem, 47.

Haulgi, an ancient king in Norway, 185.

Hávamál, an Eddaic poem, first published from the MS. by Resenius, 17;—subject, 48–9, quoted, 264;—extracts, 311—316 (see Appendix).

Heiðarvíga Saga, 68.

Heimdallr, the Warder of heaven, 95, 136.

Heimskringla, Schoning's Edition, 24; Norwegian do., 37;—account of, 75, 76.

Hel, the goddess of Death, 98–100, 101, 103, 143–4, claimed the bodies of the dead, 147–50, 308.

Helgakviða Hundingsbana, an Eddaic poem, quoted, 166, 167, 240–1, 303–4.

Helgi, a hero of the Edda.

Helgi hinn Magri, an Icelandic settler, 171.

Helgi, a son of Bele, a king in Norway, 184.

Helgoland, a sacred island of the Frisians, 177.

Helheimr, the abode of Hel, where she receives all who are not brave and virtuous, 99, 146.

Herað, in Norway, the district under a hersir, 161–2.

Herder's Eddaic translations, 30.

Hersir, a baron, in Norway, 161–2.

Hervarar Saga, 24, 63–4.

Himinbjörg, the abode of Heimdall, 95, 136, 139.

Historical interpretations, 26, 107–8,

Historical Sagas, 64–76.

Hjalti Skeggjason, 184.

Hlér (*see* Ægir), 97, 137.

Hliðskjálf, the throne of Odin, 93, 100, 123.

Hlórríði, a name of Thor, 94.

Hófgoði, a temple-priest (*see* Góði), 160.

Hófgyðja, a temple priestess (*see* Gyðja), 163.

Hólmgang, a duel, 242–258.

Horse, the, sacred to Frey, 175–6, 231.

Howitt's 'Literature and Romance of the North of Europe,' 41.

Hödur (Höðr) the blind, 96, 135;—kills Baldur the Good, 99, 144–5;—is slain by Vali, 100, 145;—rejoins the Gods, 103, 152.

Högni, a hero of the Edda, 51, 188.

Hörðaland, a petty kingdom in ancient Norway, 169, 178.

Hörg, a kind of stone altar, 205–6.

Höskuld, an Icelandic chieftain, 183–4.

Hrímfaxi, the horse of Night, 90.

Hrímþursar, frost-giants, 89, 90, 111.

Hrólf Ganger (*see* Gaungu-Hrólf).

Hrólf Kraka's Saga, 61, quoted, 188, 269.

Hrym, a Jötun, leads on the Hrímþursar to the last battle, 101.

Hræsvelgr, a Jötun, the cause of storms, 91, 113.

Huginn, a raven of Odin, 93, 128.

Hundsþorp, a town in Guðbrandsdal, 170, 198.

Hvergelmir, 89, 92, 103, 117.

Hyltèn-Cavallius, 37.

Hymiskviða, an Eddaic poem, 46.
Hyndluljóð, an Eddaic poem, 48, quoted 177, 206.
Hœnir, assists in creating man, 91, 115;—is given to the Vanir in exchange for Njörð, 94, 131.

Iceland, first visited by Irish monks, 77–8;—re-discovered and settled by the Northmen, 77–8.
Iduna, the Goddess of Immortality, 57, 95, 135.
Ihre, 26;—his 'Lexicon' and 'Letters,' 28.
Immortality of the Soul, taught by the Asa doctrine, 103, 104, 146–150, 152, 153, 155.
Ingemund Thorsteinsson, an Icelandic settler, 173, 200.
Ingólfr, a Norwegian, began the colonization of Iceland, 78.

Jens Mortensen, a Danish translator of Snorri, 15.
Jól (Yule), 220.
Jómsvíkinga Saga, 73;—quoted, 284, 303.
Jökulls, ice-mountains, the abode of Jötuns, 113.
Jörmungandr (*see* Miðgarðsormr).
Jötunheimr, the abode of the Jötuns, 113, 117, 123.
Jötuns, giants, evil beings, rude nature, 44, 89, 90, 111, 113, 193, 297;—nature's disturbing powers, 154, older than the Æsir, 119.

Kanne's 'Pantheon,' 34.
Kenníngar, third part of the Later Edda, containing poetical terms and paraphrases, 57, 58.
Kerganga, a kind of duel, 252–3.
Ketil Hæng's Saga, 64, quoted, 233.
Keyser (R.), 5, 37.
Kjalnesínga Saga, quoted 208–9.
Kjötvi, King of Agðir, 200.
Klopstock's poems, 30.
Knútr Sveinsson, hinn ríki (Canute the Great), 73, 74.
Knytlínga Saga, 23, 73, 74.
Kœppen's 'Literary Introduction to Northern Mythology, 7.
Konúngs-skuggsjá [King's Mirror], 37.
Kormak's Saga, 69–70, quoted, 194, 248–250.
Krakumál, an ancient poem, quoted, 167.
Kraku Hreiðar, an Icelandic settler, 170.
Kretschman, the Barde Rhingulph, 30.
Kristni Saga (an account of the introduction of Christianity into Iceland), 66;—first printed, 23;—quoted, 234.

Lagerbring's 'History of Sweden,' 27.
Landnámabók (history of the colonization of Iceland), 66, first printed, 24;—quoted, 191–2, 203–4, 207–8, 213, 234, 237–8, 301, 321.
Landviði, the abode of Viðarr, 96, 136, 139.
Landvættir, 179, 190–3;—drive King Eirik Blóðöx from Norway, 191;—guard Iceland against King Harald's spy, 192.
Laxdæla Saga, 71;—quoted, 266–7, 274.
Leifr hinn heppni Eiríksson, first landed in America, 79.
Lexicons and handbooks on Northern Mythology, 28, 35, 36.
Líf and Lifþrasir, } parents of the regenerated human family, 103.
Lindfors' 'History of Icelandic Literature,' 35.
Ljósálfar, light-elves, 134, 193.

Ljósvetninga Saga, quoted, 188.

Loðurr, assists in creating man, 91, 115, 142.

Lokasenna, or } an Eddaic poem,
Lokaglepsa, } 45.

Loki, the traducer and betrayer of the gods, 45;—his origin and offspring, 98;—the author of evil among gods and men, 98, 141–2;—causes the death of Baldur the Good, 99, 144, 145;—bound in a cavern until the end of time, 100, 145;—leads the troops of Hel to the last battle, 101.

Loptr, 98, 142.

Lot-casting, 281–2, 284–5.

Mallet, a French writer on Northern History and Mythology, 24, 25, 29, 41.

Markússon's 'Collection of Sagas' printed in Skalholt, Iceland, 25.

Marmier's 'Popular Songs of the North,' 40.

Maxims from the Edda, 311–316.

Megingjörðr, Thor's magic girdle, 94.

Mermaids, mermen, 300.

Miðgarðr, the world, 90, 91, 113, 115, 123.

Miðgarðsormr, the world-serpent, 98, 143;—joins in the last battle against the gods, 101, and is killed by Thor, 102.

Mímir the Wise, guards the fountain of wisdom, 92, 118, 119.

Mjölnir, Thor's hammer, 94, 130, 198, 200;—sign of the hammer made to exorcise evil beings, 171.

Mone's (F. J.) 'History of Heathendom in Northern Europe,' 34, 87.

Moster, an island on the coast of Norway, 170, 204, 207, 215.

Mounds worshiped, 233.

Mountain-giants (Bergrisar), 89, 111;—(bergbúar), 191, 297.

Müller (P. E.), 32.

Munch (P. A.), Professor of History in Christiania, 37;—his 'Mythologic and Heroic Legends,' 87.

Muninn, one of Odin's ravens, 93, 128.

Muspellheimr, the source of light and life in creation, 89, 110, 111, 122;—agent in purifying the world from evil, 101, 102, 151–2.

Mythic Sagas, 60–62.

Mæri, a chief-temple in Throndheim, 161, 170, 198, 213.

Naglfár, the ship made of dead men's nails, which bears the frost-giants to the last battle, 101.

Nanna, wife of Baldur, burned on his funeral pile, 99, 145.

Náströnd, the strand of the dead, 103, 148.

New England (Vinland), visited by the Northmen, 79.

Newfoundland (Helluland), visited by the Northmen, 79.

Niðhöggr, the primitive evil being, 89, 110;—gnaws at the root of the all-sustaining tree, 92, 118;—banished from the regenerated world, 104, 153.

Niðing, niðstaung, 191, 244.

Niflheimr, 88, 110, 124, 152.

Njál's Saga, 68;—quoted, 149, 186, 189, 199, 201–2, 295.

Njörðr, 94–5, 132–3;—worshiped as the god of seafaring, 172–3.

Nóatún, the abode of Njörð, 95, 132, 139.

Norðri (the North), one of the dwarves that hold up the sky, 91.

Nornir, the northern Fates, 92, 120, 121, 287–8.

Nótt (night), the mother of Day, 90, 114.

Nova Scotia (Markland), visited by the Northmen, 79.

Nyerup (R.) Danish antiquary and historian, 32, 35, 36.
Nykr, a fabulous sea-horse, 300, 301.

Odin, the father of the gods, 90;—with Vili and Ve created the world, 90, 112;—with Hænir and Lóðurr created man, 91, 115;—attributes, 93, 112, 119, 127–8;—relations, 129;—sings of the gods and Valhalla and Yggdrasill, 43;—asks Vafþrúdnir concerning the origin of things, 44;—calls up a Vala in order to learn Baldur's fate and the impending destiny of the gods, 45; he and Thor relate their exploits, 47;—Odin awakened the spirit of War by casting his spear over the heads of the people, 141, 166;—selects the heroes slain in battle, 151;—worshiped as the god of war, 165;—chieftains and children often consecrated to him, 167–9;—represented as one-eyed, 119, 167, 170;—statue in Upsala, 198.
Oddrúnargratr, an Eddaic poem, 54.
Oðr, the husband of Freyja, 96, 135.
Oehlenschläger, 36.
Olafr Haraldsson, a king of Norway, 184.
Olafr hinn Helgi [Olaf the Saint], Saga of, 74;—quoted, 194;—227;—Olaf destroyed a statue of Thor in Guðbrandsdal, 198–9.
Olafr Trételgja, a king in Vermaland in Sweden, 162.
Olaf Tryggvason's Saga, 74;—quoted on the worship of Thor, 171–2, 200, 201;—of Frey, 173–5;—on the guardian spirits of Iceland, 192;—Olaf burns a statue of Thor, 201;—an instance of Olaf's mode of christianizing Norway, 225–6;—227, 273–4.
Omens, 294–6.
Orkneyinga Saga, 24, 66;—quoted, 274.
Ossian's Poems awakened attention to the study of northern literature in Germany, 29.
Oxen worshiped, 231.
Oku-þórr, a name of Thor, 94.
Olvusvatn, a lake in Iceland, 186, 199.
Ondvegissúlar [sacred columns], 174, 202–4;—guided the settlers of Iceland to a home, 202–3, 280.
Orvar-Odd's Saga, 64;—quoted, 292.

Paulus Diaconus, a Longobard writer, 14.
Percy's translation of Mallet's 'Introduction,' 25, 41.
Peringskjöld, *note* 21.
Petersen's (N. M.) History of Denmark in Heathen Antiquity, 87.
Philology enriched by the studies of Northern Antiquaries, 31.
Pigott's 'Manual of Scandinavian Mythology,' 41.
Plato's Atlantis, 20;—his wisdom derived from the Swedish Skalds, 20.
Poets, 28, 30, 36–7.
Purifications, 228–9.

Rafn (Prof. C. C.), 34, 38, 77.
Ragnar Lóðbrók's Saga, 61, 62;—his death, 167;—saga quoted, 302.
Ragnarökkr, 43, 44, 101–2, 151–8, 155.
Rán, wife of Ægir, 97, 138;—claimed the bodies of the drowned, 150.
Rask (R. K.), 31, 32.
Rationalism, 21, 22.

Rauðsey, an island of Norway, 170, 201.
Raven, the, a sacred bird, 93, 128, 166, 232, 280.
Resenius, published the first edition of the Edda, 17.
Reykjanes, the southwestern promontory of Iceland, 192.
Rígsmál, an Eddaic poem, 49, 50.
Romantic literature of the south translated by the Icelanders, 64.
Romantic Sagas, 63, 64.
Röskva, an attendant of Thor, 94, 131.
Rugman (J.), a learned Icelander in Sweden, 18, 19.
Rühs, spread the study of northern literature in Germany, 30; —traced the Icelandic poetry and mythology to the Anglo-Saxons, 31.
Rúnar [runes], 163;—magic words or incantations, 263–6; used in divination, 283.
Runic Chapter, 49, 264.

Sacrifices, 166, 186, 216;—public, 217;—periodical, 219–221; —human victims, 222-3;—self-immolation, 223-4;—consecration to the gods, 224–6; gifts and offerings, 226–8.
Saga, the goddess of History, 96, 136, 139.
Sagas, 58;—relating to Denmark, 72–4;—to Norway, 74–6.
Saxo Grammaticus, 14;—quoted, 168.
Schlözer, a skeptic in northern mythology, 30.
Schöning's Heimskringla, 24;—historical writings, 27.
Schütz on Northern Antiquities, 29.
Scott's abstract of the Eyrbyggja Saga mentioned, 41.
Seers, 285–7.
Sessrymnir, the hall of Freyja, 96, 134.
Sigrdrífumál, 264, 310;—extracts in Chap. XXVII. (*see* Appendix).
Sigyn, the wife of Loki, 100.
Simrock's translation of the Eddas, 40.
Skaði, the wife of Njörð, 95, 132.
Skálda, a treatise on prosody, rhetoric, &c., connected with the Later Edda, 58.
Skiðblaðnir, the ship of Frey, 95, 134.
Skinfaxi, the steed of Day, 91.
Skirnisför, an Eddaic poem, 48.
Skuld, one of the nornir, goddess of the Future, 92, 120.
Sleipnir, Odin's eight-footed horse, 94.
Snorri Sturlason, the Icelandic historian, 15, 86;—his account of the arrival of Odin and the Æsir in the north, 158–9.
Solarljóð, an Eddaic poem, 50.
Sonargölltr, the atonement-boar, 176.
Sögubrót, a historical fragment, 62.
Sökkvabekkr, the abode of Saga, 96, 136, 139.
Stafir [letters], 163, 283.
Starkaðr, a semi-fabulous warrior or giant, sacrifices Vikarr to Odin, 169;—carries off king Álf's daughter, 185.
Stephanius, 16, 17, 18.
Stephens (G.), 37.
Stones, worshiped, 233–4.
Storms, caused by the evil Jötuns, 91, 113.
Sturlúnga Saga, 71.
Styrbjörn Sviakappi, with his hosts, slain by Odin, 168;—Thor appears to him in battle, 172.
Suðreyjar [South Islands], now Hebrides, or Western Islands, 171.
Suðri [the South], one of the four dwarves which bear up the sky, 91.

Suhm, a Danish Antiquary, 23, 24, *note* 27.
Sun, moon and stars formed from the sparks of Muspell, 90, 91, 114;—the sun and moon pursued by the Jötuns, 91, 114;—who swallow them, 101;—new ones appear, 103.
Supreme being, higher than all the Æsir, alluded to, 104, 153, 155.
Surtur, the Fire-god, 89, 101–2, 110, 152.
Svartálfar, the swarthy elves, 115.
Sæhrímnir, the boar, of whose flesh the Einherjar partake, 93.
Sæmundr hinn Fróði, editor of the Older Edda, 86.

Tacitus, quoted, 282.
Tegnèr, 36.
Temples, of Thor in Norway and Iceland, 170, 207–8;—of Frey in Throndheim and Iceland, 173–4;—one to Odin, Thor and Frey in Upsala, 175, 198;—to Baldur in Norway, 176, 199;—to Forseti in Helgoland, 177;—to Thorgerd Hörgabrúd, 186, 199;—other temples, 199, 200;—construction and arrangement of temples, 206–211;—dedication of, 211;—sanctity of, 212, 214;—support of, 214–215.
Theories concerning the Asa Mythology, 105–9.
Thiðrandi Halleson, slain by the Dísir of his family, 181–2.
Thingsókn, a judicial district in Iceland, 160.
Thjálfi, an attendant of Thor, 94, 131.
Thor, the strongest of the gods, 94;—the god of thunder, 129, 130;—his attributes, 94, 129–131;—fights against Trolls and Jötuns, 94, 130;—the god of bondsmen after death, 94, 150;—held the highest place in the worship of Norway and Iceland, 170;—directed his worshipers to a place of abode, 170–1;—invoked by those who trusted in their own strength, 171;—by wrestlers, 171–2;—sometimes appeared as a red-bearded man, 172;—statues, 198, 199, 201, 204, 207, 208:—Eddaic poems relating his deeds, 46, 47.
Thórfinnr Karlsefni, visits Greenland, 79;—visits America and remains three years, 80.
Thorgerðr Hörgabrúðr, an inferior deity, 185–7;—worshiped by Hákon Jarl, 186, 199, 226–7;—aided him against the Jömsvíkings, 186,—statue of, 199, 201.
Thorhaddr hinn Gamli, a chief-priest in Throndheim, 161.
Thorhallr, a soothsayer (spámaðr), 181–2.
Thorkelin, 24, 28.
Thorlacius, 24, 28;—the younger, 32.
Thórólfr, a sorcerer in Iceland, 187.
Thórólfr Mostrarskegg, directed by Thor to Iceland, 170, 204;—sacredness of his temple and lands, 212–13;—devoted to Thor from his birth, 225–6.
Thórsnes, a promontory in Iceland, 170.
Thórsteinn Uxafót, 189.
Thorvaldr Eiríksson, visits America, 79.
Thorvaldr Víðförli [the far-traveled], introduced Christianity into Iceland (A. D. 981), 234.
Thorvaldsen, the sculptor, a son of Icelandic parents, the lineal descendant of a native American, *note* 80.
Thorvarðr Eysteinsson, cured by the Elves, 194.

Throndheim, þrándheimr[Drontheim], temples, 170, 173, 198.
Thrúðheimr, } the abode of
Thrúðvangar, } Thor, 94, 130.
Thrymheimr, the abode of Skaði, 95, 133.
Thrymskviða, an Eddaic poem, 46.
Thulr, an improvisator, 163.
Thverá in Iceland, 174–5, 180.
Torfason, Thormóðr [Torfæus], 18, 22, 25–6.
Týr, the god of bravery, 95, 135.
Tryker, a German, found the vine growing in America, from which *Vinland* was named, 79.

Ulf the Red [Rauðúlfr], 182–3.
Ullr, the god of winter life and hunting, 96, 137, *note* 139.
Unger, 37.
Upsala, 175, 183, 198, 210.
Urðarbrunnr, the sacred fountain of the Fates, 92, 120, 121.
Urðarmáni, 295–6.
Urðr, one of the nornir, a goddess of the Past, 92, 120.
Utgarðr, the region of the Jötuns, 90, 113.
Utgarða-Loki, 142.

Vafþrúðnismál, an Eddaic poem, 28, 44;—quoted, 173.
Vala, a seeress or prophetess, 43, 45, 63;—description of, 287–293.
Valfaðir [Odin], 93, 127, 128.
Valhalla, the abode of Odin's chosen sons, 93, 97, 128, 146—150, 165–7.
Vali, one of the Æsir, 96, 135;—avenges the death of Baldur, 100, 144, 145;—rejoins the gods, 103, 152.
Valkyrjur, 93, 96–7, 120, 137, 139, 148.
Vanaheimr, the home of the Vanir, the air, 94, 123.
Vanir, 94, 96, 131–2.
Vápnafjörðr, a firth in the N. E. part of Iceland, 192.
Vatnsdal, a valley in Iceland, 180.
Vatnsdæla Saga, 70;—quoted, 173–4, 176–7, 180, 187, 200, 271–2, 276, 293, 294, 321.
Vegtamskviða, an Eddaic poem, 45.
Verðandi, one of the nornir, a goddess of the Present, 92, 120.
Vermaland, a petty kingdom in ancient Sweden, 162.
Vestri [the West], one of the four dwarves that sustain the sky, 91.
Videlin [Paul], 22.
Viðarr, the silent god, 96, 139 *note*;—the victor in the last battle, 102, 136;—rejoins the gods in the regenerated world, 103, 152.
Viga-Glum's Saga, 69;—quoted, 174–5, 180, 238–9.
Viga-Styr's Saga, 67–8.
Vigfus, a Norwegian hersir, 180, 185.
Vikarr, a king, sacrificed for a favorable wind, at the instigation of Odin, 169.
Víkingar, 13, 222;—Víking life, 61–2, 319–320.
Vingólf, the hall of the goddesses, 93, 128–9, 149.
Völsúnga Saga, 60, quoted, 167–8.
Völundar kviða, an Eddaic poem, quoted, 240.
Völuspá, an Eddaic poem, 43;—reference, 119, 139, 141.

Waterfalls, worshiped, 233, 234.
Westphalen's 'Monuments,' 29.
Wolff's Handbook of German Mythology, 40.
Worm, (Ole) [Olaus Wormius], 16.
Worship of divine beings among heathens, 156–7;—among the Northmen, 158–9;—The wor-

ship of the Gods by rulers, brought prosperity to the people; neglect thereof brought adversity, 162.

Yggdrasill, the emblem of the world, 44, 92, 102, 117.
Ymir, the first chaotic matter, 89, 111;—from which the world was formed, 90, 112, 113, 154.
Ynglínga Saga, 76, quoted, 209–210.
Yrp, an inferior deity worshiped in the North, 185;—aided Hákon Jarl against the Jómsvíkíngar, 186;—statue, 199.

Ægir, the god of the Sea, 97, 137–8; entertains the Æsir 45, 46.
Ægisdrekka (*see* Lokasenna), 45.
Æsir, 21, 26, 45, 57, 85;—descended from Odin, 90, 93, 112;—acting powers in the Creation, 90–91, 112–115;—banish evil (the Jötuns) from the world, 90, 113;—their judgment-seat, 92, 121;—home and assembling-place, 93, 122–3;—attributes and abodes, 93–97, 125–139;—they form connections with the Jötuns and bring evil into the world, 98, 141;—suffer by Loki's malignity and duplicity, 98–9, 142–5;—bind him and his offspring until the end of the world, 100, 145;—join in the last battle, 102;—are slain together with their enemies, 102, 152, 155;—arise regenerated with the new heaven and the new earth, 103, 152, 155;—historical theory of their arrival in the North, 26–7, 159.

CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.

Page 25, line 3—Mallet's 'History' comes down to the death of Christian III., to 1559.

34, 22—*For* were, *read* was.

39, 15—To the list add the title: 'Antiquités Russes et Orientales d'après les monuments historiques des Islandais et des anciens Scandinaves,' a collection of the Scandinavian sources to the history of Russia and other Eastern countries, from the earliest times to the Middle of the XV. century. 2 vols. Imp. 4to., with facsimiles, maps and plates.

48, 15—*For* Fjöls-vinns, *read* Fjölsvinns (= fjöl + svinns).

48, 27— " Ylfiinga, *read* Ylfíoga.

50, 3— " Amme, *read* Amma.

54, 1—*dele* .

54, 8—*For* Gumar, *read* Gunnar.

67, 4— " Brestason, *read* Brestisson.

108, 28— " and were clothed, *read* and clothed.

121, 25— " far, *read* for.

149, note *—*For* Ynlinga, *read* Ýnglínga.

170, 18—*For* Randsey, *read* Raudsey *or* Rauðsey.

176, note §—*For* menn á heit, *read* menn þá heit.

181, 13 }
182, 2 } *For* Thorhalli, *read* Thorhall.

189, 16—*For* Geiter, *read* Geitir.

189, note †—*For* mir, *read* mèr.

226, 27—*For* Brestersson, *read* Brestisson.

234, 15— " Viðförla, *read* Viðförli.

273, 25— " Thorer, *read* Thórir.

275, 17— " Brestarsson, *read* Brestisson.

275, 13, 20 }
276, 3 } *For* ThroND, *read* Thránd.

294, 7—*For* Silfra, *read* Silfri.